

*A Historical Survey
of Adventist Thought
on the Human
Nature of Christ*

TOUCHED WITH OUR FEELINGS

J. R. ZURCHER

*Just how much was Jesus like us
when He was here on earth?*

In the early years of the Adventist Church many of the leaders believed Christ was not eternal, but had a beginning in time. By the 1890s the church was moving toward a more orthodox position. Another belief long held by church leaders is that Christ was born with a fallen nature. This view also began to change in the 1950s toward the position that Christ was born with physical degeneracy but not the propensities to sin that all other human beings are born with. In *Touched With Our Feelings* author J. R. Zurcher explores evidence from Scripture and Adventist history to support a return to the traditional view that Jesus took the nature of Adam after the Fall.

In this study on the nature of man, Zurcher examines the biblical doctrine of Christ's human nature. Carefully tracing the development of the doctrine of Christ within the Adventist Church, Zurcher maintains that the glory of our Saviour's successful mission to this world is enhanced, not diminished, by the fact that He triumphed in spite of taking all the liabilities of "sinful flesh."



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Adventist Thought on
the Human Nature of Christ*

*“When we want a deep problem to study,
let us fix our minds on the most
marvelous thing that ever took place
in earth or heaven—the incarnation
of the Son of God.”*

Ellen G. White

The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 904.

J. R. ZURCHER

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on the Human Nature of Christ*

Based on the French
“Le Christ Manifesté en Chair”

Translated by Edward E. White

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*To my son Frederic,
without whose help this book would
not have seen the light of day.*

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PREFACE

From the time I was a small boy in the early 1920s my parents taught me that the Son of God came into this world with a physical heritage like that of any other human baby. Without making a big point of the sinners in His ancestry, they told me of Rahab and David, and emphasized that in spite of His inherited physical liabilities Jesus lived a perfect life as a child, youth, and adult. They told me that He understood my temptations, for He was tempted as I was, and that He would give me power to overcome as He did. This made a deep impression on me. It helped me look to Jesus not only as my Saviour but as my Example, and believe that by His power I could live the victorious life.

In later years I learned that my parents' teaching regarding Jesus was well supported by the Bible, and that Ellen G. White, God's messenger to the remnant, had made this truth clear in numerous statements, such as the following:

"Let children bear in mind that the child Jesus had taken upon Himself human nature, and was in the likeness of sinful flesh, and was tempted of Satan as all children are tempted. He was able to resist the temptations of Satan through His dependence upon the divine power of His heavenly Father, as He was subject to His will, and obedient to all His commands" (*Youth's Instructor*, Aug. 23, 1894).

"Jesus once stood in age just where you now stand. Your circumstances, your cogitations at this period of your life, Jesus has had. He cannot overlook you at this critical period. He sees your dangers. He is acquainted with your temptations" (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 4, p. 235).

One of the major reasons that Christ entered the human family to live a victorious life from birth to maturity was to set an example for those He came to save. "Jesus took human nature, passing through infancy, childhood, and youth, that He might know how to sympathize with all, and leave an example for all children and youth.

He is acquainted with the temptations and weaknesses of children” (*Youth’s Instructor*, Sept. 1, 1873).

In my academy and college years I continued to hear from Adventist teachers and ministers that Jesus took the same kind of flesh that every human being must take—flesh affected and influenced by the fall of Adam and Eve. It was pointed out that Catholics do not believe this, because their doctrine of original sin requires them to distance Jesus from sinful flesh. They did this by creating the doctrine of the immaculate conception, the doctrine that Mary, the mother of Jesus, though conceived naturally, was from the moment of her conception free from any stain of original sin; thus, since she was unlike her ancestors and the rest of the fallen human race, she could provide her Son with flesh like that of the unfallen Adam. Although Protestants reject this Catholic doctrine, most still argue for a difference between Christ’s humanity and that of the human race He came to save. Supernaturally, they say, He was cut off from the genetic inheritance He would have received from His sin-fallen forebears, and hence was exempt from certain tendencies against which human beings as a whole must battle.

Challenged by Critics

Because Adventists from the beginning have held that Jesus took human nature as He found it after more than 4,000 years of sin, ministers and theologians of other churches have distorted this belief and used it to turn people away from the Sabbath truth and the three angels’ messages. With the doctrine of original sin in their frame of reference, they have declared that if Jesus took a body “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3, KJV) He would have been a sinner and hence would have Himself needed a Saviour.

In the early 1930s an article challenging three Adventist teachings, including the nature of Christ, appeared in *Moody Monthly*. Francis D. Nichol, editor of the *Review and Herald* (now *Adventist Review*), responded to the charges by writing a letter to the editor. Regarding the teaching that Christ “inherited a sinful, fallen nature,” he said:

“The belief of the Seventh-day Adventists upon this subject is

definitely set forth in Hebrews 2:14-18. To the extent that such a Bible passage as this teaches the actual participation of Christ in our nature, we teach it." Later, in an editorial commenting on the critic's response to his statement, he wrote, in part:

"We readily agree that for one to say that Christ inherited a 'sinful, fallen nature' might, in the absence of any other qualifying statement, be misunderstood as meaning that Christ was a sinner by nature, even as we. This would indeed be an appalling doctrine. But no such doctrine as this is believed by us. We teach unqualifiedly that though Christ was born of woman, partook of the same flesh and blood as we, was so truly made like unto His brethren that it was possible for Him to be tempted in all points like as we are, yet that He was without sin, that He knew no sin.

"The key to the whole matter, of course, is the phrase 'yet without sin.' We believe unreservedly this declaration of Holy Writ. Christ was truly the Sinless One. We believe that He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us. Otherwise He could not have been our Saviour. No matter in what language any Adventist may endeavor to describe the nature which Christ inherited on the human side—and who can hope to do this with absolute precision and with freedom from any possible misunderstanding?—we believe implicitly, as already stated, that Christ was 'without sin'" (*Review and Herald*, Mar. 12, 1931).

The position set forth by Elder Nichol was precisely the belief that the church, as well as many respected non-Adventist Bible students, had held throughout the decades. It certainly was the view held by Ellen White, who wrote: "In taking upon Himself man's nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin. . . . He was touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are. And yet He knew no sin. . . . We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ" (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 256).

Dialogue and Change

Imagine my surprise, then, when, as one of the editors of the *Review* in the 1950s, I heard some church leaders say that this was not

the correct view—that it was the view of only the “lunatic fringe” in the church! Dialogue was taking place with a few evangelical ministers who were committed to a view of the nature of man that included the “immortal soul” error. I was told that our position on Christ’s human nature was being “clarified.” As a result of this dialogue, several church leaders who had been involved in the discussions announced that Christ took the nature of Adam before—not after—the Fall. The shift was 180 degrees—Postlapsarian to Prelapsarian.

This dramatic change drove me to study the question with an intensity bordering on obsession. With all the objectivity I could muster, I examined the Scriptures. I read Ellen White’s writings. I read the statements of Adventist thinkers who had set forth their views during the previous hundred years. I examined studies and books by contemporary Adventist authors and non-Adventist theologians. I tried to understand what effect this shift in belief might have on (1) the symbolism of Jacob’s ladder reaching all the way from heaven to earth; (2) the purpose of Christ’s taking human flesh; (3) the relationship of His humanity to being qualified as our high priest (Heb. 2:10; cf. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 745 and *The Story of Jesus*, p. 155); (4) the relative difficulty of battling the adversary in sinless flesh instead of sinful flesh; (5) the deeper meaning of both Gethsemane and Calvary; (6) the doctrine of righteousness by faith; and (7) the value of Christ’s life as an example to me.

For 40 years I have continued this study. As a result, I have come to understand better not only the importance of holding a correct view of Christ’s human nature, but two Ellen White comments on why even simple truths are sometimes made to appear confusing: 1. “Professed theologians seem to take pleasure in making that which is plain, mysterious. They clothe the simple teachings of God’s Word with their own dark reasonings, and thus confuse the minds of those who listen to their doctrines” (*Signs of the Times*, July 2, 1896). 2. “Many a portion of Scripture which learned men pronounce a mystery, or pass over as unimportant, is full of comfort and instruction to him who has been taught in the school of Christ. One reason why many theologians have no clearer understanding of God’s Word is they close their eyes to truths which they do not wish

to practice. An understanding of Bible truth depends not so much on the power of intellect brought to the search as on the singleness of purpose, the earnest longing after righteousness" (*Counsels on Sabbath School Work*, p. 38).

During recent decades a number of writers have attempted to make a case for their belief that Christ took the pre-Fall nature of Adam. Their biblical proof texts seem strong only when interpreted according to the presuppositions they have brought to them. On occasion they have even employed an *ad hominem* approach in which they have endeavored to discredit well-respected Adventist teachers and ministers who have held to the post-Fall view. As I see it, their attempts have been patterned after the lawyer who is reputed to have said, "If you have a strong case, stick to the facts. If you have a weak case, try to confuse the issue. If you have no case, rail on the jury."

It is my deep conviction that before the church can proclaim with power God's last warning message to the world, it must be united on the truth about Christ's human nature. Thus I have long hoped that someone with impeccable spiritual and academic credentials would set forth in succinct, readable form a comprehensive view of Bible- and Spirit of Prophecy-based Christology and of how the church deviated from the truth on this question 40 years ago.

This book meets that hope. I have known the author for many years. He is a loyal Seventh-day Adventist, a scholar who has pursued truth with unusual objectivity. Nearly three decades ago he made a well-received contribution to contemporary theology by authoring the book *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1969). With his clear understanding of the nature of humanity, Jean Zurcher has had the insights necessary to examine the biblical doctrine of Christ's human nature. In the present volume he carefully sets forth the truth about Christ's human nature, and shows that the glory of the Saviour's successful mission to this world is enhanced, not diminished, by the fact that He triumphed in spite of taking the liabilities of "sinful flesh."

I believe that this carefully researched and well-written book will be enthusiastically received by all who love truth and want to understand better how intimate is the relationship between Jesus and

the human family. Truly “the humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God” (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244).

Kenneth H. Wood, Chair
Ellen G. White Estate Board of Trustees
August 10, 1996

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of the Christian Church the subject of Christology, which deals with “Christ, His person and work,”¹ has been at the heart of many theological disputes. The most dangerous heresies and most dramatic schisms have had their origin in the diversity of theories regarding the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Because of the Hellenization of the faith and the emergence of heretical doctrines, the apostles and their successors were forced to wrestle with the issue of the divine-human nature of Christ. This resulted in the eventual creation of “a Christology in the strict sense of the word, that is to say, an express doctrine of the person of Jesus Christ.”²

Today Christ’s human nature remains a serious problem for Christianity, and various denominations attempt to resolve it in a variety of ways. It is a most important topic. Upon this point depends not only our understanding of the work of Christ but also our understanding of the way of life expected from each of us as we seek “the truth that is in Jesus” (Eph. 4:21).

The Apostles Confronted With Early Heresies

It is interesting to notice that at the outset of Christianity the question raised about the subject of the person of Jesus was not “What was *His nature?*” but rather “*Who* is He?” When Jesus asked His disciples, “*Who* do people say the Son of Man is?” they replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” He asked, “*Who* do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:13-16).

As the evangelization of the Graeco-Latin world progressed, the question was no longer a simple matter of knowing who Jesus was.

Now the question changed: How did Jesus relate to God? Was He truly divine, or was He just a man? If both, how can we explain the relationship between His divine and His human nature? In time the church, confronted with heresy, was forced to consider these questions and to attempt to answer them.

Paul and John were the first to refute false teachings about the nature of Christ in response to doubts that arose about His divinity and His humanity. In his Epistle to the Philippians, after emphasizing Christ's equality with God, Paul says that Jesus came into this world "in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man" (Phil. 2:7, 8). Likewise, having written to the Romans that God sent "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3, KJV), he states emphatically to the Colossians that Christ "is the image of the invisible God," and that "in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Col. 1:15; 2:9).

Moreover, John was compelled to assert in his gospel both that "the Word was God" and that "the Word became flesh" (John 1:1, 14). Then, confronted with Gnostic claims, he decided that it was necessary to warn the church against those who denied Christ's humanity: "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus ["come in the flesh" is understood] is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist" (1 John 4:2, 3).

Christology Throughout the Centuries

As early as the second century the successors of the apostles were drawn into relentless arguments dealing with the person of Christ, and in particular with His nature. Faced with the development of Arianism, which denied the divinity of Christ, the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325) settled the problem by affirming the divine nature of Jesus. There remained the problem of the two natures, human and divine, that was settled at the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), and this dogma became the declaration of faith of the Catholic Church.

The Reformers were not really Christological innovators; they

were more concerned with problems concerning the nature of faith and justification than with those of Christology. Generally speaking, they all accepted “the fundamental dogma of the essential divinity of Jesus Christ with the unity of person and duality of natures.”³ Only a few Protestant theologians in French-speaking Switzerland ultimately abandoned “the doctrine of the two natures.”⁴

However, several theologians of the twentieth century have followed in their footsteps. Oscar Cullmann, for example, considers that “the discussion concerning the ‘two natures’ is, ultimately, a Greek problem, not a Jewish or biblical one.”⁵

Emil Brunner asserts that “the whole complex of the problems raised by the doctrine of the Two Natures is the result of a question that is wrongly posed, of a question which wants to know something which we simply cannot know, namely, how divinity and humanity are united in the Person of Jesus Christ.”⁶

This notable departure from the dogma of Chalcedon by these theologians lies at the root of a new trend in Christology. The vast majority of theologians today, Catholic and Protestant alike, recognize that the study of the mystery of Christ can no longer be separated from its significance for humanity. In other words, one characteristic of contemporary Christologies is that they are more closely connected with anthropology.

Quite naturally, this new relationship leads some theologians to a much deeper consideration of Christ’s human nature. The concept that the Son of man took on human nature is acknowledged by all Christians. But the question is What kind of human nature did He take on: the one affected by the Fall, or the one originally created by God? In other words, Adam’s nature before, or after, the Fall?

Contemporary Christology

Through past centuries, daring to suggest that Christ’s human nature was that of Adam after the fall would have been considered serious heresy. Today many consider that this question is still arguable.⁷ Nevertheless, we must certainly recognize that the most eminent Protestant theologians of the second half of the twentieth century, such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann, Oscar

Cullmann, J.A.T. Robinson, and others, have openly declared themselves in support of a human nature affected by the Fall.

Karl Barth was the first to state his support for this explanation, in an article published as early as 1934.⁸ But his most comprehensive account is found in his *Dogmatics*, under the title “Truly God and Truly Man.”⁹ Having affirmed his belief that Jesus Christ was “truly God,” he considers at length how “the Word was made flesh.” For him there was no possible doubt as to the sinful human nature of Jesus. Most certainly he said, “He [Jesus] was not a sinful man. But inwardly and outwardly His situation was that of a sinful man. He did nothing that Adam did. But He lived life in the form it must take on the basis and assumption of Adam’s act. He bore innocently what Adam and all of us in Adam have been guilty of. Freely He entered into solidarity and necessary association with our lost existence. Only in this way ‘could’ God’s revelation to us, our reconciliation with Him, manifestly become an event in Him and by Him.”¹⁰

Having justified his conclusions with verses from Paul and the Epistle to the Hebrews, Barth adds: “But there must be no weakening or obscuring of the saving truth that the nature which God assumed in Christ is identical with our nature as we see it in the light of the Fall. If it were otherwise, how could Christ be really like us? What concern would we have with Him? We stand before God characterized by the Fall. God’s Son not only assumed our nature but He entered the concrete form of our nature, under which we stand before God as men damned and lost. He did not produce and establish this form differently from all of us; though innocent, He became guilty; though without sin, He was made to be sin. But these things must not cause us to detract from His complete solidarity with us and in that way to remove Him to a distance from us.”¹¹

Emil Brunner, in his *Dogmatics*, came to the same conclusion. He did not hesitate to state that “the fact that He was born of a woman, just as we are, shows that He was true Man.”¹² He probes: “But was Jesus really a man like ourselves—and thus a sinful man?” The answers come from Scripture: “The apostle Paul, speaking of the real humanity of Jesus, goes as far as possible when he says that God sent His Son in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3, KJV). The epistle

to the Hebrews adds: 'One that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin' (Heb. 4:15)."¹³ While Brunner agrees that "He is a Man like ourselves," he also recognizes that "He is *not* a Man like ourselves."¹⁴

Relying on the same verses, Bultmann and Cullmann agree entirely. In his commentary on Philippians 2:5-8 Cullmann writes: "In order to take the 'form of a servant,' it was necessary first of all to take the form of a man, that is to say, a man affected by the human downfall. This is the meaning of the expression 'being made in human likeness' (verse 7). This sense of *homoiomati* is perfectly justified. The more so as the next phrase emphasizes that by becoming incarnate, Jesus, 'man,' completely accepted the condition of 'men.' He who, in essence, was the only God-man, . . . became by obedience to His calling, a celestial Man, in order to accomplish His expiatory work, a Man incarnate in sinful flesh."¹⁵

It would be a shame not to mention here the position of the Anglican bishop J.A.T. Robinson, who, in his study on the idea of "body" in Pauline theology, expressed himself more clearly than anyone else as to the human nature of Jesus. "The first act in the drama of redemption," he writes, "is the self-identification of the Son of God *to the limit*, yet without sin, with the body of the flesh in its fallen state."¹⁶

"It is necessary to stress these words," he specifies, "because Christian theology has been extraordinarily reluctant to accept at their face value the bold, and almost barbarous phrases which Paul uses to bring home the offense of the Gospel at this point. Traditional orthodoxy, both Catholic and Protestant, has held that Christ assumed at the Incarnation an unfallen human nature."¹⁷

"But, if the question is restated in its Biblical terms, there is no reason to fear, and indeed the most pressing grounds for requiring, the ascription to Christ of a manhood standing under all the effects and consequences of the Fall. At any rate, it is clear that this is Paul's view of Christ's person, and that it is essential to his whole understanding of His redeeming work."¹⁸

Besides, the problem has been the object of a suggestion by Thomas F. Torrance, in the setting of the Commission "Faith and

Constitution” of the World Ecumenical Council, held at Herrenalb, Germany, in July 1956. “We need to take more seriously that the Word of God assumed our *sarx*, i.e., our fallen humanity (not one immaculately conceived), and so doing hallowed it. The doctrine of the Church needs to be thought out in terms of the fact that Christ Jesus assumed our humanity and sanctified Himself. The Church is *Sancta* in Christ’s sanctification.”¹⁹

Thomas Torrance is still more explicit: “Perhaps the most fundamental truth which we have to learn in the Christian Church, or rather relearn since we have suppressed it, is that the Incarnation was the coming of God to save us in the heart of our fallen and depraved humanity, where humanity is at its wickedest in its enmity and violence against the reconciling love of God. That is to say, the Incarnation is to be understood as the coming of God to take upon Himself our fallen human nature, our actual human existence laden with sin and guilt, our humanity diseased in mind and soul in its estrangement or alienation from the Creator. This is a doctrine found everywhere in the early church in the first five centuries, expressed again and again in terms that the whole man had to be assumed by Christ if the whole man was to be saved, that the unassumed is unhealed, or that what God has not taken up in Christ is not saved. . . . Thus the Incarnation had to be understood as the sending of the Son of God in the concrete form of our own sinful nature and as a sacrifice for sin in which He judged sin within that very nature in order to redeem man from his carnal, hostile mind.”²⁰

The list of theologians who today are writing along these lines of thought could be extended. But these men have had forerunners, among which are the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Forerunners of Contemporary Christology

It would be wrong to think that these twentieth-century theologians were pioneers in their position regarding the human nature of Christ. Karl Barth quotes many nineteenth-century authors in his *Dogmatics* who held to the belief of the fallen nature.²¹

In a still more detailed manner, Harry Johnson, a strong supporter of the fallen nature of Jesus, refers back to Gregory of Nazianzus (329-

389), who spoke convincingly of Christ: "For that which He has not assumed, He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved."²² Then Johnson devotes a full chapter to the teaching of a dozen forerunners from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, from Antoinette Bourignon to Edward Irving, who all affirmed that Christ took on the human nature as it was in Adam after the Fall.

With Johnson, we conclude this historical summary of testimonies by contemporary theologians. Since around 1850 the Christology of the Adventist pioneers has run along the same lines of interpretation. At the time, this position was still uncommon and was considered heretical by traditional, mainline Christianity. How interesting it is that the Christology of these pioneers is now confirmed by some of the best of contemporary theologians!

It follows that the Christology developed by the pioneers of the Advent movement between 1852 and 1952 could well be considered to be the vanguard of contemporary Christology. Such an advanced position, then, deserves to be examined in detail for the benefit of those who are searching for Christological foundations.

A History of Adventist Christology

Several English authors have in recent years expressed themselves on the subject, most of whom take a pre-Fall or modified pre-Fall position. However, until now there has been no work which examines the history of belief on this subject in the Adventist Church.

Some authors have generously provided typescript works that have been particularly helpful in this project. These include (1) that of Herbert E. Douglass, *A Condensed Summary of the Historic SDA Positions on the Humanity of Jesus*; (2) William H. Grotheer, *An Interpretative History of the Doctrine of the Incarnation as Taught by the SDA Church*; (3) Bruno W. Steinweg, *The Doctrine of the Human Nature of Christ Among Adventists Since 1950*. These authors are to be especially thanked.

The history of Christology presented in these pages is divided into five sections. Part I begins with a chapter devoted to Christ's divinity, a doctrine that was not accepted without argument by many Adventist leaders. In the second chapter the biblical foundations are

presented on which was based the interpretation of the fallen nature of Christ unanimously accepted between 1852 to 1952.

Part II is devoted to a detailed study of Christology as understood by Adventist pioneers, while Part III contains a collection of testimonies scattered throughout the official literature of the church. In Part IV we profile the historical outline of the controversy that arose about 1950 following a new interpretation. This section is based essentially on Ellen White's writings.

I hope the reader will understand the significance and magnitude of the current controversy. Perhaps the discussion of current views in Part V will help in some small way to reunite the church's thinking on the subject of Christ's human nature.

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³ M. Getaz Op, *Les variations de la doctrine christologique chez les théologiens de la Suisse romande au XIXe siècle* (Fribourg: Editions de la librairie de l'Université, 1970), p. 18.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵ Cullmann, p. 12.

⁶ Emil Brunner, *Dogmatics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1952), Vol. II, p. 352.

⁷ Henri Blocher, *Christologie* (serie Fac. etude, Vaux-sur-Seine: 1984), Vol. II, pp. 189-192.

⁸ Karl Barth, "Offenbarung, Kirche, Theologie," in *Theologische Existenz heute* (München: 1934).

⁹ Barth, *Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 2, pp. 132-171.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹² Brunner, Vol. II, p. 322.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 323.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

¹⁵ Cullmann, p. 154.

¹⁶ J.A.T. Robinson, *The Body, a Study in Pauline Theology* (London: SCM Press, LTD, 1952), p. 37.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 37, 38.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

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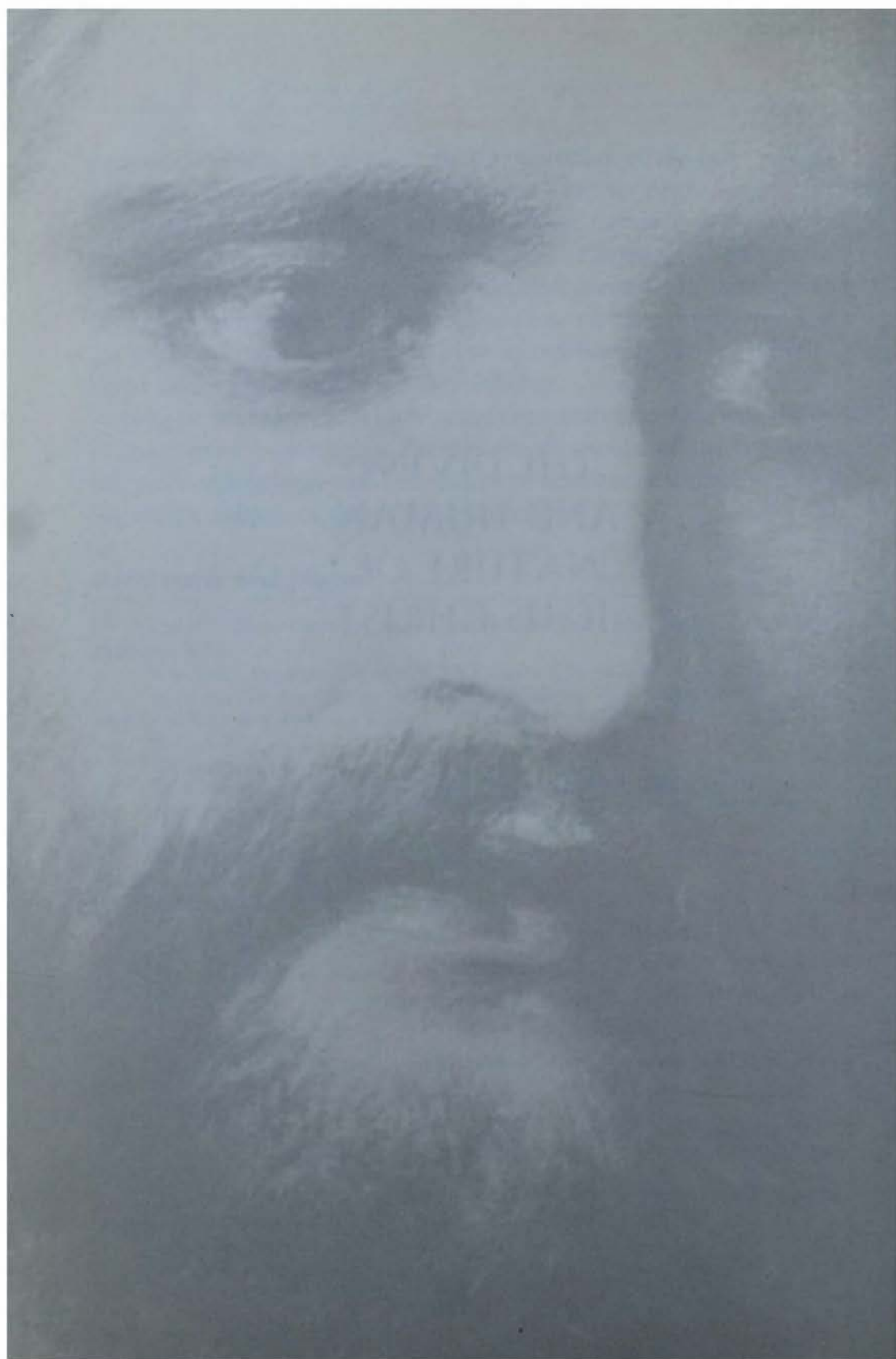
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²¹ See Barth, *Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 2, pp. 153-155.

²² See Johnson, pp. 129-189.

Part I

THE DIVINE
AND HUMAN
NATURE OF
JESUS CHRIST



THE DIVINITY OF CHRIST

Since the early beginning of the Advent movement in 1844, the divinity of Jesus Christ has always been one of its fundamental beliefs. Formulated for the first time in 1872 and several times since then, it was stipulated again in the following terms at the General Conference session of 1980: “God the Eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ”¹

This does not mean that at the beginning of the movement believers did not have various shades of opinion regarding Jesus’ divinity. Of those pastors who joined the Advent movement in 1844, 38 believed in the Trinity, while five were semi-Arian, including James White, Joseph Bates, Uriah Smith and, later, Joseph H. Waggoner—all pillars of the new faith. Some of these men came out of the Christian Connection, a movement that denied the equality of the Father and the Son.²

These men did not deny the divinity of Christ or that He was the Creator of heaven and earth, the Son of God, Lord and Saviour; but they argued about the meaning of the words “Son” and “Father,” affirming that the Son had a beginning in the infinite past—a semi-Arian position.

When they became Seventh-day Adventists, these pastors retained their semi-Arian beliefs for a while; it shows up here and

there in their writings. Its eventual disappearance is marked with little controversy. Such controversy might have endangered the unity of the new movement, but the pioneers expressed openly their divergent opinions and discussed them in a spirit of prayer, and found solutions through intense study of the Word of God.

James Springer White (1821-1881)³

James White was a cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with Ellen G. White and Joseph Bates. He was born August 4, 1821, at Palmyra, Maine. His father was a descendant of one of the *Mayflower* pilgrims. After hearing William Miller preach about the second coming of Christ, James White joined the Millerite movement and experienced the Great Disappointment of 1844. While many who had expected the coming of Jesus in glory on October 22, 1844, gave up their faith, James White formed the nucleus of a group who became the pioneers of the Advent movement.

James White was a brilliant preacher and a prolific writer. Greatly encouraged by Ellen Harmon, whom he married in 1846, he started several magazines: *Present Truth* in 1849, *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* in 1850, *Youth's Instructor* in 1852, and *Signs of the Times* in 1874. Between 1853 and 1880 he published four books and several pamphlets.

In articles published in *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* James White expressed his views on the divinity of Jesus. At first he categorically rejected what he described as "the old trinitarian absurdity" which favored the idea that "Jesus Christ is the very and Eternal God."⁴ However, after 1853 he affirmed his belief in the divinity of Christ.⁵

Twenty-three years later he wrote that Seventh-day Adventists "hold the divinity of Christ so nearly with the Trinitarian."⁶ In 1877 he published an article entitled "Christ equal with God."⁷ A short time before his death he stated clearly once again that "the Son was equal with the Father in creation, in the institution of the law and in the government of created intelligences."⁸ While James White's position was rather moderate, such was not the case with Uriah Smith.

Uriah Smith (1832-1903)⁹

Uriah Smith was born in New Hampshire in 1832, shortly after William Miller began to preach the imminent return of Christ. He was 20 when he became an Adventist in 1852. As early as 1855 he was appointed assistant editor of the *Review and Herald*, where he was a close associate of James White. Very quickly he became chief editor, a position he held almost continuously until his death.

Uriah Smith had a dominating personality and held strongly to his convictions. His books and articles exercised a strong influence on the church's doctrinal beliefs. He is known mainly for his books on Bible prophecy: *Daniel and the Revelation*, *The United States in Prophecy*, and *Looking Unto Jesus*.

Like James White, Joseph Bates, and others, Uriah Smith eventually gave up his semi-Arian position, but not without difficulty. In his first book, *Thoughts on the Revelation* (1867), he openly stated his antitrinitarian views.¹⁰ Not only did he deny the existence of the Holy Spirit, but he also considered that "complete eternity . . . can be applicable only to God, the Father."¹¹ This language, he says, is never applied to Christ.

In his commentary on Revelation 3:14, Uriah Smith specifies that Christ is not recognized as "the beginner, but the *beginning*, of the creation, the *first created being*."¹² Shortly thereafter he moderated his antitrinitarian statements. At the time of the publication of *Daniel and the Revelation* in 1882, he explained that the "only begotten Son" of John 3:16 could hardly be applied to "a being created in an ordinary sense."¹³

In 1898, in his last book, *Looking Unto Jesus*, Uriah Smith renounced the idea of Christ as "a created being." But he maintained that at some point in time Jesus "appeared," and that consequently He had a beginning. "God alone is without beginning. At the earliest epoch when a beginning could be—a period so remote that to finite minds it is essentially eternity—appeared the Word. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God' (John 1:1, KJV). This uncreated Word was the Being who, in the fullness of time, was made flesh, and dwelt among us. His beginning was not like that of any other being in the universe."¹⁴

Speaking of the position of Christ before the Incarnation, Smith affirmed that it was “equal to the Father.” However, “no work of creation was accomplished till after Christ became an active agent upon the scene.”¹⁵ Then appears this odd statement: “With the Son, the evolution of deity, as deity, ceased.”¹⁶ In other words, Smith held that Christ was not created, but was “derived from God.”¹⁷

This point of view was also held by Joseph H. Waggoner.

Joseph H. Waggoner (1820-1889)¹⁸

Joseph H. Waggoner was a zealous defender of the semi-Arian position, especially as it related to the divinity of Christ. He was also opposed to the doctrine of the Trinity and considered the Holy Spirit as merely an impersonal influence.¹⁹

Waggoner does not appear to have belonged to the Christian Connection, but these views were shared by several denominations of that period. Before joining the growing Advent movement, he was a member of the Baptist Church, and was employed as the assistant editor for a political journal in Wisconsin. Very quickly he found his place at the side of the Adventist pioneers and held very influential positions, such as editor for *Signs of the Times*, following James White. He later edited the *American Sentinel*, and finally the *Pacific Health Journal*. He was the author of various articles and several books, including *The Atonement* in 1868, and *From Eden to Eden* in 1886.

Joseph H. Waggoner could not attend the General Conference session of Minneapolis in 1888 because of ill health. He died in 1889. The question of the divinity of Jesus was on the agenda for the 1888 Conference. On this occasion Joseph’s son, Ellet J. Waggoner, refuted the last semi-Arian arguments remaining in the church, and ultimately laid the biblical foundation needed to establish the full and complete divinity of Jesus Christ.

Ellet J. Waggoner (1855-1916)²⁰

Ellet J. Waggoner was the first Adventist theologian to present a systematic Christology, both as it relates to the divinity and the humanity of Jesus Christ.

Born in Baraboo, Wisconsin, Ellet J. Waggoner studied at Battle

Creek College, Michigan. He continued his studies at Bellevue Medical College, New York, working toward a diploma in medicine. He began his career as a doctor at the Battle Creek Sanitarium. But he found that he preferred to preach, so he entered the gospel ministry.

After revealing a talent for writing, he was asked to serve as assistant editor for the *Signs of the Times* magazine²¹ in 1884, under the direction of his father. Two years later he became chief editor, a position he held until 1891. From 1892 to 1902 he worked in England, first as editor of *Present Truth* magazine, then as the first president of the South England Conference. Upon his return to the United States, because of his divorce and remarriage, he spent the remainder of his career separated from the church as a professor of theology at Battle Creek College under J. H. Kellogg.²²

Waggoner was a most prolific theologian. He wrote several important books,²³ a large number of pamphlets, and hundreds of magazine articles. But Waggoner is best known for the role he played at the General Conference session of 1888 at Minneapolis with his colleague, Alonzo T. Jones. Together they made their mark in the history of the Adventist Church with their presentations on justification by faith. For Waggoner, the subject could be understood only through the lens of Christology.

As early as 1884 Waggoner published a series of articles in the *Signs of the Times*, in which he affirmed his faith in the divinity of Christ, Creator of all things, whom the angels worship exactly as they do God the Father. "He [God] gave His only-begotten Son—the one by whom all things were made, whom angels worship with reverence equal to that which they yield to God—that man might have eternal life."²⁴

At the General Conference session of Minneapolis in 1888, Waggoner presented a series of talks on the divinity of Christ—a subject that was on the agenda of the conference. While he left no written version of his presentations, Waggoner did publish a series of four articles on the same subject immediately after the session.²⁵ This suggests that they were accounts of his talks. They are found also in the first four sections of the book *Christ and His Righteousness*, pub-

lished the following year in 1890. This book contains most of the dominant ideas of Waggoner's Christology.²⁶

At the time several leaders of the church still cherished semi-Arian, or adoptionist, concepts concerning the divine nature of Christ; hence the significance of the question raised by Waggoner as he took on the problem: "Is Christ God?"

To prove that He really was God, Waggoner quoted many verses in which Christ was called God.²⁷ For the benefit of those who still denied it, he specified that the name of God "was not given to Christ in consequence of some great achievement, but it is His by right of inheritance."²⁸ "Christ is the 'express image' of the Father's person (Heb. 1:3). . . . As the Son of the self-existent God, He has by nature all the attributes of Deity."²⁹ Christ Himself taught in the most categorical manner that He was God (John 14:8, 9; 10:33; 8:58).³⁰ Waggoner emphasized the importance of Paul's declaration in Col. 1:19: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him;" and 2:9: "all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." Waggoner labels this the "most absolute and unequivocal testimony,"³¹ a notion that was repeated 15 times in his study.

It is not enough to say: "Jesus Christ is God." The apostles describe Him also "as Creator." Waggoner quotes Colossians 1:15-17, which "leaves not a thing in the universe that Christ did not create. . . . All depend upon Him for existence. . . . He upholds all things by the word of His power."³² In Hebrews 1:8-10, the Father Himself says to the Son: "Thou, O Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the works of Thine hands."³³

Who then can dare deny "the divinity of Christ and the fact that He is the Creator of all things"?³⁴ To insist as "many people" do, that "Christ is a created being" on the basis of the single verse in Revelation 3:14, is quite simply to deny His divinity.³⁵ The same is true when one relies on Paul's expression, declaring that Christ was "the firstborn over all creation" (Col. 1:15). The following verse, observes Waggoner, shows clearly that He is "the Creator, and not a creature."³⁶

However, even Waggoner believed that "there was a time when Christ proceeded forth and came out from God, from the

bosom of the Father (John 8:42; 1:18), but that time was so far back in the days of eternity that to finite comprehension it is practically without beginning.”³⁷

Finally, Waggoner emphasized that “since He is the only begotten Son of God, He is of the very substance and nature of God, and possesses by birth all the attributes of God. . . . He possesses immortality in His own right, and can confer immortality upon others.”³⁸ That is why, Waggoner concludes: “He is rightly called Jehovah, the I AM.”³⁹

Waggoner’s insistence that Christ was by nature of the same substance as God and possessed life in Himself was no doubt a novelty in the eyes of some of the delegates at the Minneapolis session. His position on the divine nature of Christ was probably part of the reason for the opposition by many of the delegates to his message of justification by faith. He evidently felt it was essential to affirm the equality of Christ with God, for only the life of God in Christ had the power to save sinners by justifying them by His grace.

Waggoner’s contribution on this point, as on that concerning the human nature of Christ was decisive. Froom recognizes it readily: “In 1888 Waggoner was pioneering without the benefit of her [Ellen White] many later statements” “not only on Christ’s eternal preexistence but on His individual self-existence and His infinity, equality, and omnipotence.”⁴⁰

Ellen White herself expressed it after hearing Waggoner: “The fullness of the Godhead in Jesus Christ has been set forth among us with beauty and loveliness.”⁴¹ For her, it demonstrated that God was at work among them. Waggoner’s interpretation was, for the most part, the theological demonstration of what she had always believed and stated in her writings up to that time.

Ellen Gould White (1827-1915)⁴²

Brought up in the faith of the Methodist Church, Ellen White had no problem dealing with Christ’s divinity, His preexistence, and His equality with the Father. It is, in large measure, thanks to her and to her writings that the doctrine of the Trinity was ultimately established. Uninitiated into the complexities of theology, she care-

fully avoided falling into the trap of past Christological controversies. Likewise, she never took part in direct confrontations with her closest associates who held erroneous ideas about the person of Christ. This did not prevent her influence from being decisive.

Born on November 26, 1827, in Gorham, Maine, Ellen grew up in a God-fearing family. At the age of 12 she was baptized by immersion into the Methodist Church. At the close of William Miller's sermons on the soon return of Christ, the whole family joined the Millerite movement and experienced the great disappointment of October 22, 1844.

In December 1844, still stunned by those events, Ellen experienced her first vision during a prayer meeting. As time passed it became apparent that the Lord had bestowed upon her the gift of prophecy, speaking to her in dreams and visions. As the messenger of the Lord, she served as counselor at the very heart of the church. In August 1846 Ellen Harmon married James White. Together they served as pillars of the Advent movement.

We cannot emphasize enough how the Lord used Ellen White to lead the small Adventist community, from its very beginning, to the Bible as the Word of God, and through the Bible to Jesus Christ. If there is one writer who honors, adores, and exalts Christ, His character, His life, and His work, it is Ellen White. To see this, one need only read the books she wrote regarding His life and teachings.⁴³ Indeed, in all of her books the Son of God is the central subject.

At Minneapolis Ellen White upheld the principle of *sola scriptura*, promoted by Waggoner, to resolve the problem confronting the delegates on the subject of the divinity of Christ, justification by faith, and the law in Galatians. She had been unable to find a previous manuscript she had written on the subject to J. H. Waggoner, and she suggested that this might be providential: "God has a purpose in this. He wants us to go to the Bible and get the Scripture evidence."⁴⁴ In her closing talk entitled "A Call to a Deeper Study of the Word," Ellen White advanced an example of Waggoner's own method.

"Dr. Waggoner," she said, "has presented his views in a plain, straightforward manner, as a Christian should. If he is in error, you should, in a calm, rational, Christlike manner, seek to show him

from the Word of God where he is out of harmony with its teachings. . . . Let us take our Bibles, and with humble prayer and a teachable spirit, come to the great Teacher of the World. . . . The truth must be presented as it is in Jesus. . . . We must search the Scriptures for evidences of truth. . . . All who reverence the Word of God just as it reads, all who do His will to the best of their ability, will know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.”⁴⁵

Because she had followed this method from the beginning, Ellen White never had a problem with Christ’s divinity. She affirmed Christ’s equality with God.⁴⁶ She described Him as “the Majesty of heaven . . . equal with God,”⁴⁷ “Sovereign of heaven, one in power and authority with the Father,”⁴⁸ “of one substance, possessing the same attributes” with the Father,⁴⁹ “the only-begotten Son of God, who was with the Father from eternal ages,”⁵⁰ “the Lord God . . . clothed with the habiliments of humanity,”⁵¹ “Infinite and omnipotent; the eternal, self-existent Son.”⁵²

In her major work, *The Desire of Ages*, first published in 1898, Ellen White writes in the first lines of the book: “From the days of eternity the Lord Jesus Christ was one with the Father; He was ‘the image of God,’ the image of His greatness and majesty, ‘the outshining of His glory.’ It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world . . . to be ‘God with us.’”⁵³ Even more pointedly, she wrote, “In Christ is life, original, unborrowed, underived . . . The divinity of Christ is the believer’s assurance of eternal life.”⁵⁴

In an article published in 1900, Ellen White insisted, “Christ is the preexistent, self-existent Son of God. . . . In speaking of His pre-existence, Christ carries the mind back through dateless ages. He assures us that there never was a time when He was not in close fellowship with the eternal God. He to whose voice the Jews were then listening had been with God as one brought up with Him.”⁵⁵

Likewise, in another article, dated April 5, 1906, Ellen White stated for the last time what became the official belief of the Adventist Church on the matter of the divinity of Christ. “Christ was God essentially, and in the highest sense. He was with God from all eternity . . . a distinct person, yet one with the Father.”⁵⁶

Ellen White’s influence was decisive in helping to dissipate the

remaining semi-Arian beliefs that remained among some members at the heart of the church. She was favorably supported by Ellet J. Waggoner, and later by William W. Prescott,⁵⁷ and Arthur G. Daniells.⁵⁸

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¹⁰ See Froom, pp. 158, 159.

¹¹ Uriah Smith, *Thoughts on the Revelation* (n.p., 1867), p. 14.

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¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

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¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁸ See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, p. 1563.

¹⁹ See Froom, pp. 167-175.

²⁰ See Eric Claude Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), pp. 157-247.

²¹ Initially this review was called *The Signs of the Times*, but later *Signs of the Times*.

²² See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, vol. 10, p. 1563.

²³ The main books are: *Fathers of the Catholic Church* (Oakland: Pacific Press Pub. Co., 1888); *The Gospel in the Book of Galatians* (Oakland: Pacific Press Pub. Co., 1888); *Christ and His Righteousness* (Oakland: Pacific Press Pub. Co., 1890); *The Gospel in Creation* (Battle Creek, Mich.: International Tract Society, 1895); *The Glad Tidings* (Oakland: Pacific Press Pub. Co., 1900); *The Everlasting Covenant* (London: International Tract Society, 1900).

²⁴ Ellet J. Waggoner, in *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 28, 1884.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Mar. 25, 1889; Apr. 1, 8, 15, 1889.

²⁶ See Jean R. Zurcher, "Ellet J. Waggoner's Teaching on Righteousness by Faith" (paper presented at the White Estate Consultation V, Washington, D.C., January 1988).

²⁷ Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, pp. 9-16.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-15.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 19–21.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 22–25.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁴⁰ Froom, p. 296.

⁴¹ Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, May 27, 1890.

⁴² See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, pp. 1584–1592; Webster, pp. 82–88.

⁴³ The best known: *Steps to Christ* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1892); *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Battle Creek, Mich.: International Tract Society, 1896); *Christ Our Saviour* (Battle Creek, Mich.: International Tract Society, 1896); *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Co., 1898); *Christ's Object Lessons* (Battle Creek, Mich.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900).

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White manuscript 15, 1888. Quoted in A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966), p. 293.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 294–302.

⁴⁶ See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, p. 287.

⁴⁷ Ellen G. White manuscript 4, 1863, in *Selected Messages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Co., 1958), book 1, p. 69.

⁴⁸ Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy Between Christ and Satan* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1888), p. 459.

⁴⁹ ———, in *Signs of the Times*, Nov. 27, 1893.

⁵⁰ ———, *Fundamentals of Christian Education* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1895), p. 382.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 379.

⁵² Ellen G. White manuscript 101, 1897, quoted in Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946), p. 615.

⁵³ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1964), p. 19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 530.

⁵⁵ ———, in *Signs of the Times*, Aug. 29, 1900.

⁵⁶ ———, in *Review and Herald*, Apr. 5, 1906.

⁵⁷ William W. Prescott (1855–1944), editor of the *Review and Herald* (1903–1909) and vice president of the General Conference, published in 1920 *The Doctrine of Christ*, a series of Bible studies containing 18 lessons. This was really the first Adventist attempt at systematic theology on the person of Christ. See our chapter 6.

⁵⁸ Arthur G. Daniells (1858–1935), president of the General Conference from 1901 to 1922, published in 1926 *Christ Our Righteousness* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn.). This book exerted a strong Christ-centered influence on the ministerial body.

CHRIST'S HUMAN NATURE

It has always been a challenge to understand Christ's human nature, perhaps more so than to comprehend His divine nature. Christ's human nature has been the crux of controversy from the first centuries of the Christian Era until now, to the point that Christology is today confined mostly to the study of Christ's human nature. The critical question is whether the flesh of Jesus was that of Adam before or after the Fall. In other words, was Jesus' flesh free from the influences of sin or subject to the power of sin and death?

This is a problem of major importance. If we are mistaken about the human nature of Jesus, we risk being mistaken about every aspect of the plan of salvation. We may fail to understand the redemptive reality of the grace bestowed upon humans by Jesus to set humanity free from the power of sin.

Ellen White stressed this fundamental truth: "Christ's overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of the Lord. When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity."¹

The Incarnation, a Mystery

Undeniably, the incarnation of the Son of God is a mystery. The apostle Paul declared, "Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was

seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory" (1 Tim. 3:16).

This mystery concerns all aspects of the plan of salvation, not just the Incarnation. It is no wonder that Ellen White should declare: "The study of the incarnation of Christ, His atoning sacrifice and mediatorial work, will employ the mind of the diligent student as long as time shall last."² Concerning the Incarnation she writes similarly: "In contemplating the incarnation of Christ in humanity, we stand baffled before an unfathomable mystery, that the human mind cannot comprehend. The more we reflect upon it, the more amazing does it appear."³

The fact that it is an unfathomable mystery does not imply that it is a forbidden subject, to be shunned as incomprehensible. Does not Paul speak of "the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints . . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26, 27)? He also announces that the mystery of godliness "was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world" (1 Tim. 3:16). This implies a progressive revelation of truths God wants to impart to humankind for the purpose of leading humanity to salvation.

Even though she asserts that Christ's incarnation was indeed a mystery, Ellen White invites us to study it in depth. She gives good reason why it is so important: "The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study." But here she slips in a word of caution: "When we approach this subject, we would do well to heed the words spoken by Christ to Moses at the burning bush, 'Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground' (Ex. 3:5, KJV). We should come to this study with the humility of a learner, with a contrite heart." In closing she says: "The study of the incarnation of Christ is a fruitful field, which will repay the searcher who digs deep for hidden truth."⁴

The problem we seek to understand is not so much the method of the Incarnation—*how* in Christ the divine nature was able to unite with human nature. That is a mystery that lies far beyond our comprehension. The problem Christology seeks to resolve is the *why* of

Incarnation and in what kind of *flesh* Jesus was really manifested. This is the heart of the problem; in this regard the New Testament is not wanting for explicit information.

The Biblical Foundations of Christology

The only way the pioneers were able to dissociate themselves from the influence of their semi-Arian traditions was by trusting entirely the teaching of Scripture. By doing so, they opened the way to a Christology that the best exegetes of the twentieth century have only recently come to confirm in their studies.

Apart from the New Testament, it is difficult to specify what sources lay behind the early Adventist attribution of “sinful flesh” to Jesus. On the other hand, it is easy to retrace the biblical references used by early Adventist writers to define the nature of the flesh in which Jesus overcame the power of sin.

The most quoted text, and the most explicit, was Romans 8:3. No other passage seemed to explain better the reason for the Incarnation, and in what sort of flesh it was achieved. “God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man.”

The first Adventist theologians quite naturally interpreted the KJV expression “in the likeness of sinful flesh” as Paul’s definition of the flesh of Jesus at the time of His incarnation. They considered the word “likeness” to be used in precisely the same sense as in Philippians 2:7, which says that Jesus, after having divested Himself of the form of God and of His “equality” with Him, took “the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.” That is to say, Jesus did not simply have a *human appearance*, but in fact a *like nature*, with “sinful flesh,” *sarkos hamartias*, as Paul states in Romans 8:3 (KJV). This was not understood to imply that Jesus had been a sinner or that He had participated in the slightest in man’s sin.

The expression “God . . . condemned sin in the flesh” was interpreted to mean that Jesus, having lived a life without sin, in “sinful flesh,” had actually “condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3, KJV). Accordingly, “he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Heb. 5:9). Thus, from its very beginning the

Christology of the pioneers was developed in direct relation to their Soteriology, the latter being a function of the former.

Among other texts often quoted, we also find Romans 1:3 (KJV), which defines the nature of Jesus through His ancestors: "made of the seed of David according to the flesh." Hebrews 2:16 was also cited: "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham." One writer mentioned some of the least praiseworthy of Abraham's posterity and commented, "A brief glance at the ancestry and the posterity of David will show that the line from which Christ sprang was such that would tend to concentrate in Him all the weaknesses of humanity."⁵

Several other passages from the Epistle to the Hebrews were cited that emphasized the identity of the human nature of Jesus with that of His human brethren. For example: "Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family" (Heb. 2:11). "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity" (verse 14). "For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way" (verse 17). Yet another: "We have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

Paul's declaration in Galatians 4:4, 5, was often quoted as implying a real and complete participation in fallen humanity as a condition for man's salvation: "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, *born of a woman, born under law*, to redeem those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons." Likewise in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God *made him* who had no sin *to be sin for us*, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

These are some of the key passages relied upon by Adventist theologians and writers prior to 1950 in defining the human nature of Jesus. In fact, the very first statements found in official church literature show that the meaning given to biblical expressions relative to the human nature of Jesus was clearly established.

The First Adventist Testimonies

According to Ellen White, the human nature of Christ was defined at the very beginning by the early pioneers, along with other

fundamental beliefs. "After the great disappointment . . . the truth was opened point by point, and entwined with their most hallowed recollections and sympathies. The searchers after truth felt that the identification of Christ with *their nature and interest was complete*."⁶

The first reference to the human nature of Jesus from the pen of chief editor James White is found in the *Review and Herald* of September 16, 1852. He writes in the editorial: "Like Aaron and his sons, He [Jesus] took upon Him flesh and blood, the seed of Abraham."⁷ The following year, in an article signed "an English author," we read: "Jesus Christ, who tells you He is 'the Son of God,' one with the Father . . . who 'took on Him the seed of Abraham;' our nature, and upheld it sinless."⁸

In 1854 J. M. Stephenson wrote a series of articles on the human nature of Jesus. "To say that God sent His own Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh,' is equivalent to saying that the Son of God assumed our nature."⁹ To answer the question "What blood was shed for the remission of sins?" Stephenson replies: "Was it not the identical blood which had flowed through the veins of Mary, His mother, and back through her ancestry to Eve, the mother of all living? Otherwise He was not 'the seed of the woman,' of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David."¹⁰

Apart from these three authors, no one wrote on the human nature of Jesus in the 1850s with the exception of Ellen White. Her first statement, dating back to 1858, occurs in the description of a dialogue between Jesus and His angels discussing the plan of salvation. Having revealed to them that He would abandon His celestial glory, would be incarnated on the earth, would humble Himself as an ordinary man, and would be tempted as a man in order to provide assistance to those who would be tempted, "Jesus also told them that they would have a part to act . . . ; He would take man's *fallen nature*, and His strength would not be even equal with theirs."¹¹

In the same account Ellen White declared that at the end of the revelation of Jesus, Satan "told his angels that when Jesus should take *fallen man's nature*, he could overpower Him and hinder the accomplishment of the plan of salvation."¹²

For Ellen White the whole plan of salvation depended on the

human nature of Christ. "It was in the order of God," she wrote in 1864, "that Christ should take upon Himself the *form and nature of fallen man*."¹³ For her, "the great work of redemption could be carried out only by the Redeemer taking the place of *fallen Adam*. . . . The King of glory proposed to humble Himself to *fallen humanity*. . . . He would take *man's fallen nature*."¹⁴

The First Official Declaration

These first witnesses expressed not only their own personal points of view, but also the convictions of the whole community. That is why their view was included in *A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by Seventh-day Adventists*, published in 1872.

The preamble to this document explicitly states that the articles of faith did not constitute a creed, but simply "a brief statement of what is, and has been, with great unanimity, held by them."¹⁵ We know, in fact, that James White as far back as 1847, expressed himself as being against any idea of confining the fundamental beliefs of the church in an inflexible creed. "The Bible is a perfect, and a complete revelation. It is our only rule of faith and practice."¹⁶

That was not intended to prohibit any declaration of faith. On the contrary, the church was obligated to declare its beliefs as clearly as possible, for the benefit of members as well as nonmembers. But, "the Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed. . . . Man is fallible, but God's Word is infallible."¹⁷

Of the 25 articles of faith in this first official doctrinal statement of the church, the second one is about the person and work of Jesus Christ. It declares "that there is one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father, the One by whom God created all things, and by whom they do consist; *that he took on him the nature of the seed of Abraham* for the redemption of our fallen race; that he dwelt among men full of grace and truth."¹⁸

The declaration does not specify how Adventists of that time understood the expression "the nature of the seed of Abraham." However, we do have the interpretations of those who used this phrase before and after 1872. Not content with merely quoting

literally the Bible text, James White wrote that Jesus “took upon Him *flesh and blood*, the seed of Abraham.”¹⁹ This is already an explanation of a sort. As we shall see, most of those who used the expression gave it the same meaning as Ellen White: “Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His early ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life.”²⁰

It is interesting to note that the official declaration of 1872 on the human nature of Christ remained unchanged until 1931. At that time it was changed to express with different words the same basic conviction. “While retaining His divine nature, He took upon Himself the nature of the human family, and lived on the earth as a man.”²¹ Placed within the context of the writings of that period, this new formulation continues what had been the unanimous teaching of the church until 1950, namely, that the flesh of Jesus was “flesh like unto sinful flesh.”

A Human Nature in a Fallen State

The official declaration of 1872 as to the human nature of Jesus constitutes the cornerstone of pre-1950 Adventist Christology. According to Ralph Larson, it has been reaffirmed up to 1,200 times by Adventist writers and theologians, of which about 400 are by Ellen White herself.²²

About 1950, however, influenced by extrabiblical considerations, another interpretation arose in Adventist circles, affirming that the human nature of Jesus was that of Adam before the Fall. This was clearly a return to the creeds of former centuries. This change was all the more surprising because at the same time, the most eminent Protestant theologians of the second half of the twentieth century were emancipating themselves from traditional positions and unwittingly confirming the interpretation that had prevailed until then in the Adventist Church.

One can only be astonished at this sudden change of interpretation within the church, especially after presenting a unanimous front for a century of consistent teaching on this subject. In fact, since the

beginning of the movement, the fallen human nature of Christ had never been the subject of any controversy—unlike other doctrinal points, such as the divinity of Christ. A manuscript note of William C. White, as well as other documents emanating from the General Conference session at Minneapolis, confirms that “Christology was not the point of friction in 1888.”²³

Throughout the 1890s Christology became a favorite subject among Adventist preachers. Ellen White in particular continually insisted on the importance of the subject in all her writings while emphasizing the fallen human nature of Jesus. The reason is plain. First, it served the purpose of affirming the reality of Christ’s humanity even more emphatically than other Christians, who tended to hold to the immaculate human nature of Jesus, namely that of Adam *before* the Fall.

As our study will verify, the work of redemption can be explained only with the proper understanding of the divine-human person of Jesus Christ. To be mistaken about Christology is to be mistaken about the work of salvation as accomplished in human beings, by Christ, through the process of justification and sanctification.

Finally, this topic proved to be important in the instruction of new converts to Adventism. It was so contrary to their belief that it represented for many a serious challenge. It is no wonder that so many questions were being asked of Ellen White and editors of various church publications. Their answers contain a wealth of valuable information.

References and Notes

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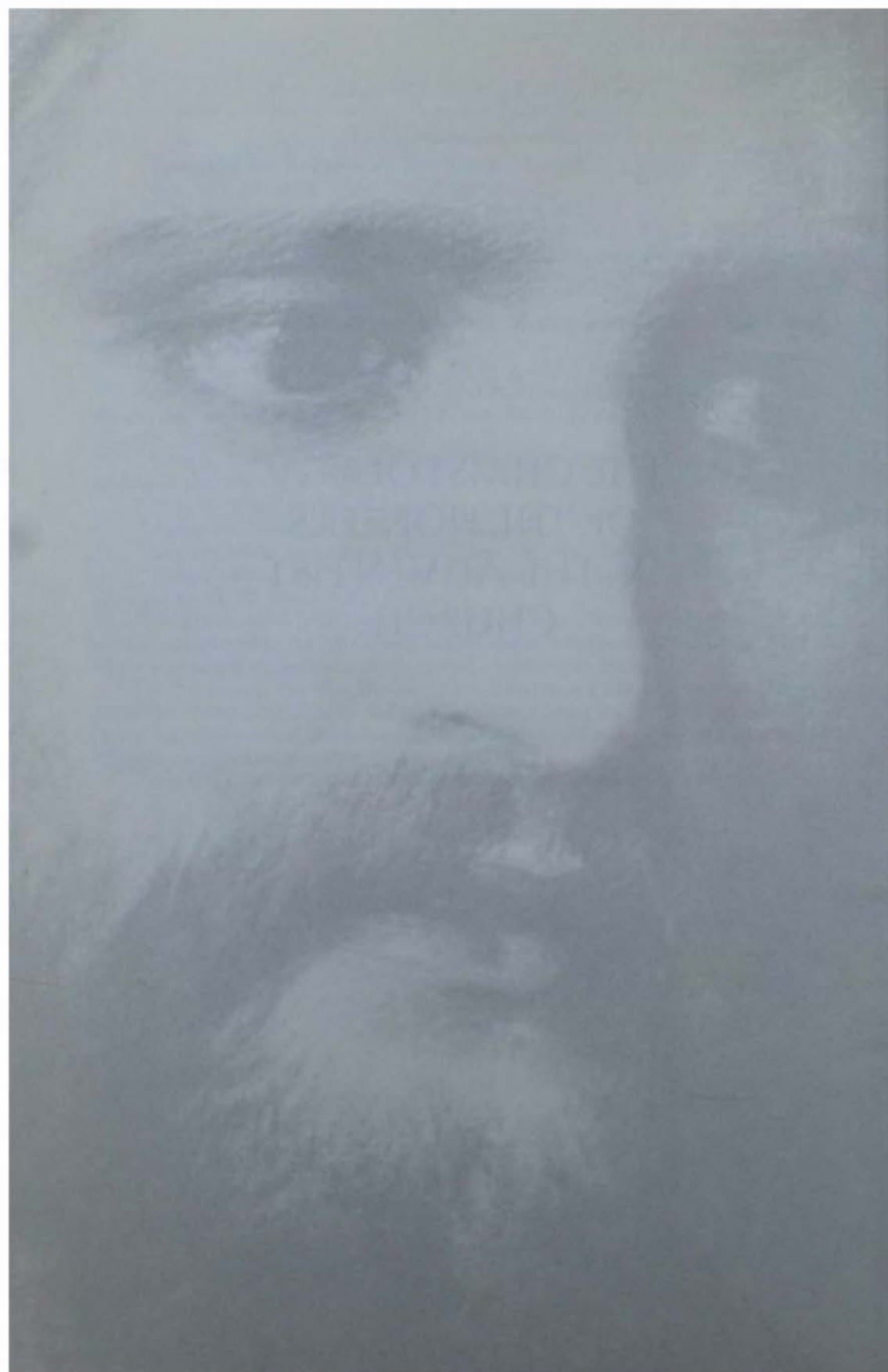
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⁶Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 109, 110. (*Italics supplied.*)

- ⁷James S. White, in *Review and Herald*, Sept. 16, 1852.
- ⁸*Ibid.*, Oct. 18, 1853.
- ⁹J. M. Stephenson, in *Review and Herald*, Nov. 9, 1854.
- ¹⁰*Ibid.*, July 15, 1854.
- ¹¹Ellen G. White, *Early Writings* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1945), p. 150. (Italics supplied.)
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- ¹⁵*Review and Herald*, Jan. 2, 1872. See P. Gerard Damsteegt, *Foundations of the Seventh-day Adventist Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1978), pp. 301-305.
- ¹⁶James S. White, "A Word to the Little Flock," p. 13. Quoted in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, p. 358.
- ¹⁷Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 416.
- ¹⁸*Review and Herald*, Jan. 2, 1872. (Italics supplied.)
- ¹⁹James S. White, in *Review and Herald*, Sept. 16, 1852. (Italics supplied.)
- ²⁰Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49. See similar interpretations in our following pages 47, 81, 92, 98-99, 108, 110.
- ²¹See Fundamental Belief No. 3, *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (1931). This same declaration was adopted by the Fall Council of 1941 and included in the *Church Manual* (1942), where it remained unchanged through various editions up to 1980.
- ²²Ralph Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh, One Hundred Years of Seventh-day Adventist Christology, 1852-1952* (Cherry Valley, Calif.: Cherrystone Press, 1986), pp. 220, 245. Larson has taken a census chronologically of the declarations relating to the human nature of Christ contained in denominational literature.
- ²³See Eric Claude Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology*, p. 176, note 56.

Part II

THE CHRISTOLOGY
OF THE PIONEERS
OF THE ADVENTIST
CHURCH



THE CHRISTOLOGY OF ELLEN G. WHITE (1827-1915)

Ellen White played an important role during the formation of the fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church. She was the first—indeed, the only—leader before 1888 to express in writing the position on the human nature of Jesus that was ultimately embraced by the young community.

After her first statements on this matter in 1858, Ellen White continued to express her thoughts on the subject with increasing clarity in articles published in the *Review and Herald*, and later in her books. In 1874 a series of articles dealing with the temptation of Christ set forth the essence of her Christology.¹ In 1888, at the General Conference session in Minneapolis, where Ellet J. Waggoner made Christ's divinity and humanity the foundation of justification by faith, all the elements of his Christology had already been expressed in Ellen White's writings.

The person and work of Jesus were always at the center of Ellen White's interest. "The humanity of the Son of God" was everything to her. She called it "the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God."² This subject is central to her writings up until her death in 1915. Only six months before laying down her pen, she wrote: "He [Christ] made Himself of no reputation, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh. . . . Sinless and exalted by nature, the Son of God consented to take the habiliments of humanity, to become one with the fallen race. The eternal Word consented to be made flesh. God became man."³

Unfortunately, Ellen White never treated the subject as a whole in a systematic manner. This is a source of difficulty. Among her 120,000 manuscript pages,⁴ her statements on the human nature of Jesus number in the hundreds. Moreover, depending on the circumstances and the specific point under consideration, the same concepts are sometimes presented so differently that they may sometimes appear contradictory. So it is important to place the statements in their proper context and avoid the temptation to rely on isolated statements, a basic requirement of sound exegesis. We will strive to follow these rules in the synthesis of Ellen White's Christology which follows.

The Humanity of Jesus Christ

As we have seen, Ellen White compellingly stated the *divinity* of Christ. She is emphatic on this point. Yet she speaks of the humanity of Jesus with the same conviction. There is no trace of docetism in her writings. The triumph of the plan of salvation depends entirely upon the Incarnation, upon the Word becoming flesh, and upon the Son of God made into man.

"Christ did not make believe take human nature; He did verily take it. He did in reality possess human nature. 'As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same' (Heb. 2:14, KJV). He was the son of Mary; He was of the seed of David according to human descent. He is declared to be a man, even the Man Christ Jesus."⁵

Ellen White stresses the human reality of Jesus. "He did not have a mere semblance of a body, but He took human nature, participating in the life of humanity."⁶ "He voluntarily assumed human nature. It was His own act, and by His own consent."⁷ "He came as a helpless babe, bearing the humanity we bear."⁸

Not content with stating this concept in a general manner, Ellen White is not hesitant to be specific: "When Jesus took human nature, and became in fashion as a man, He possessed all the human organism."⁹ His faculties had even been brought down "to the level of man's feeble faculties."¹⁰ Although Christ took human nature with "the results of the working of the great law of heredity," yet He "was free from physical deformity."¹¹ "His physical structure was

not marred by any defect; His body was strong and healthy. And throughout His lifetime He lived in conformity to nature's laws. Physically as well as spiritually, He was an example of what God designed all humanity to be through obedience to His laws."¹²

Repeatedly Ellen White explains that "had He not been fully human, Christ could not have been our substitute."¹³ On this particular point there is no divergence among Adventist theologians. The points of view differ, but only with regard to the kind of human nature with which Christ was clothed: Was it that of Adam *before* or *after* the Fall?

Adam's Nature Before or After the Fall?

This is really a paramount question. Proponents of two opposing interpretations have clashed vigorously since 1950. It is amazing that the question should have arisen at all. Obviously no one would insinuate that Adam before the Fall had a flesh "like unto sinful flesh," as the apostle Paul says Christ had (Rom. 8:3, KJV).

Ellen White compares the nature and position of Adam before the Fall, and the nature and position of Jesus after thousands of years of sin: "Adam was tempted by the enemy, and he fell. It was not indwelling sin which caused him to yield; for God made him pure and upright, in His own image. He was as faultless as the angels before the throne. There were in him no corrupt principles, no tendencies to evil. But, when Christ came to meet the temptation of Satan, He bore the likeness of sinful flesh."¹⁴

In her book *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White several times contrasts the nature and situation of Adam and Jesus: "It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man's nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life."¹⁵

Again, "In our humanity, Christ was to redeem Adam's failure.

But when Adam was assailed by the tempter, none of the effects of sin were upon him. He stood in the strength of perfect manhood, possessing the full vigor of mind and body. He was surrounded with the glories of Eden, and was in daily communion with heavenly beings. It was not thus with Jesus when He entered the wilderness to cope with Satan. For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth; and Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation.”¹⁶

Finally, Ellen White leaves little doubt about her position regarding the post-Fall nature of Christ in this 1874 statement: “The great work of redemption could be carried out only by the Redeemer *taking the place of fallen Adam*.”¹⁷ A 1901 statement makes the same point: “The nature of God, whose law had been transgressed, and *the nature of Adam, the transgressor*, meet in Jesus, the Son of God, and the Son of man.”¹⁸ However, she does qualify this in an 1890 statement: “*We must not think that the liability of Christ to yield to Satan’s temptations degraded His humanity and that He possessed the same sinful, corrupt propensities as man*. The divine nature, combined with the human, made Him capable of yielding to Satan’s temptations. Here the test to Christ was far greater than that of Adam and Eve, for Christ took our nature, fallen *but not corrupted*.”¹⁹

In all of Ellen White’s writings there is not a single reference that identifies Christ’s human nature as that of Adam before the Fall. On the contrary, declarations abound that affirm that Jesus took Adam’s nature after 4,000 years of sin and degeneration. In other words, He took our flesh in a fallen state; or, to borrow Paul’s expression: “in the likeness of sinful flesh.”

A Human Nature in a Fallen State

Ellen White strongly stresses the likeness between Jesus’ nature and ours. Not content with saying that Jesus took our nature, she repeats that He took it in its “fallen state,” “degenerated and marred by sin,” with its “weaknesses” and “infirmities.” She used such expressions repeatedly to describe the human nature assumed by Jesus.

The expression Ellen White uses most to describe the flesh that

Jesus took is borrowed from Paul: "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3, KJV). She amplifies it by saying: "He was not only made flesh, but he was made in the likeness of sinful flesh."²⁰ In another statement she uses the language of Philippians 2:7, which states that Jesus Christ was "made in the likeness of men." She also uses Romans 8:3: "He made Himself of no reputation, took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of sinful flesh."²¹

Ellen White often cites 2 Corinthians 5:21: "God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us." She connects this not only with the death of Christ on the cross as a vicarious substitution "for the sins of the whole world" (1 John 2:2), but also in connection with the beginning of His ministry, at the time of His temptation in the wilderness, and throughout His life, as establishing the true nature of Christ, who "himself bore our sins in his body on the tree" (1 Peter 2:24).

"Christ bore the sins and infirmities of the race as they existed when He came to the earth to help man. . . . And in order to elevate fallen man, Christ must reach him where he was. He took human nature, and bore the infirmities and degeneracy of the race. He, who knew no sin, became sin for us. He humiliated Himself to the lowest depths of human woe, that He might be qualified to reach man, and bring him up from the degradation in which sin had plunged him."²²

With regard to subjects as serious and delicate as this one, Ellen White is very clear, and she uses distinct language without double meanings. The participation of Christ in the fallen nature of humanity could not be described with more clarity.

"Laying aside His royal crown, He condescended to step down, step by step, to the level of fallen humanity."²³ "Think of Christ's humiliation. He took upon himself, fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin."²⁴ Even more: "He humbled Himself, and took *mortality* upon Him."²⁵ "This was humiliation greater than finite man can comprehend."²⁶ "Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation."²⁷

To avoid any possible misunderstanding about the reality of the participation of Jesus in the nature of fallen humanity, Ellen White

often employs the verb “assume,” implying that He really had taken it upon Himself. “Christ *assumed* our fallen nature, and was subject to every temptation to which man was subject.”²⁸ “He *assumed* the liabilities of human nature, to be proved and tried.”²⁹ “He *assumed* human nature, and its infirmities, its liabilities, its temptations.”³⁰

Christ’s participation in the full and complete human nature in its fallen state is set forth by Ellen White as the sine qua non for man’s salvation. “It was in the order of God that Christ should take upon Himself the form and nature of fallen man, that He might be made perfect through suffering, and endure Himself the strength of Satan’s temptations, that He might the better know how to succor those who should be tempted.”³¹ “By this act of condescension He would be enabled to pour out His blessing in behalf of the fallen race. Thus He has made it possible for us to partake of His nature.”³²

This is also what the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches us. Jesus “had to be made like his brothers in every way,” so that He might be in a position to deliver human beings from their sins (Heb. 2:17). Then he adds: “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted” (verse 18).

“Tempted in Every Way, Just as We Are”

Ellen White did all she could to explain the meaning of this truth. “Our Saviour came to this world to endure in human nature all the temptations wherewith man is beset.”³³ “He knows by experience what are the weaknesses of humanity, what are our wants, and where lies the strength of our temptations; for He was ‘in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.’”³⁴ “He knows how strong are the inclinations of the natural heart,”³⁵ having experienced them Himself. “Some may think that Christ, because He was the Son of God, did not have temptations as children now have. The Scriptures say He was tempted in all points like we are tempted.”³⁶

“The temptations to which Christ was subjected were a terrible reality. . . . If this were not so, if it had not been possible for Him to fall, He could not have been tempted in all points as the human family is tempted. The temptations of Christ, and His sufferings under them, were proportionate to His exalted, sinless character. . . . He ‘re-

sisted unto blood' in that hour when the fear of moral failure was as the fear of death. As He bowed in Gethsemane, in His soul agony, drops of blood fell from His pores, and moistened the sods of the earth. . . . Upon the cross Christ knew, as no other can know, the awful power of Satan's temptations."³⁷

"Never another of woman born was so fiercely beset by temptation."³⁸ "As really did He meet, and resist the temptations of Satan as any of the children of humanity."³⁹ In His conflict in the wilderness, "the humanity of Christ was taxed as none of us will ever know. . . . These were real temptations, no pretense."⁴⁰ The apostle confirms this when he speaks of the tests that Jesus had to bear: "In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12:4).

In the same letter Ellen White lists the temptations Jesus had to confront: "The Son of God in His humanity wrestled with the very same fierce, apparently overwhelming temptations that assail men—temptations to indulgence of appetite, to presumptuous venturing where God has not led them, and to the worship of the god of the world, to sacrifice the eternity of bliss for the fascinating pleasures of this life."⁴¹

"The enticements which Christ resisted were those that we find it so difficult to withstand. They were urged upon Him in as much greater degree as His character is superior to ours. With the terrible weight of the sins of the world upon Him, Christ withstood the test upon appetite, upon the love of the world, and upon that love of display which leads to presumption."⁴²

"It is a mystery that is left unexplained to mortals that Christ could be tempted in all points like as we are, and yet be without sin."⁴³ On occasion individuals questioned the fallen nature of Jesus. Ellen White responded: "Letters have been coming in to me, affirming that Christ could not have had the same nature as man, for if He had, He would have fallen under similar temptations. If He did not have man's nature, He could not be our example. If He was not a partaker of our nature, He could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for Him to yield to temptation, He could not be our helper."⁴⁴

“Many claim that it was impossible for Christ to be overcome by temptation. Then He could not have been placed in Adam’s position; He could not have gained the victory that Adam failed to gain. If we have in any sense a more trying conflict than had Christ, then He would not be able to succor us. But our Saviour took humanity, with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man, with the possibility of yielding to temptation. We have nothing to bear which He has not endured.”⁴⁵

However, “in taking upon Himself man’s nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin.”⁴⁶ Here is another solemn truth which Ellen White never failed to repeat while emphasizing the reality of the temptations to which Jesus was subjected. For, as it is written: “We have one [Jesus] who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Heb. 4:15).

“. . . Yet Was Without Sin”

Every time Ellen White wrote on the delicate subject of the fallen nature of Christ, she was careful to add immediately that Christ lived “without committing sin,” neither in thought, word, or deed.

In a letter to W.L.H. Baker, who evidently had a tendency to speak of Christ as a man “altogether human,” Ellen White suggested that he be more guarded: “Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ, or that He in any way yielded to corruption.”⁴⁷ “Not even by a thought could Christ be brought to yield to the power of temptation.”⁴⁸ “Not one impure word escaped His lips. Never did He do a wrong action, for He was the Son of God. Although He possessed a human form, yet He was without a taint of sin.”⁴⁹ “In His human nature, He maintained the purity of His divine character. He lived the law of God, and honored it in a world of transgression.”⁵⁰

“Amid impurity, Christ maintained His purity. Satan could not stain or corrupt it. His character revealed a perfect hatred for sin.”⁵¹ “Could one sin have been found in Christ, had He in one particular yielded to Satan to escape the terrible torture, the enemy of God and man would have triumphed.”⁵²

Some believe that Jesus was tempted only externally, never internally. If that were so, He would not truly have been tempted as we are. Neither would He have known “the strength of our temptations,”⁵³ and “the strength of passion of humanity,”⁵⁴ to which humans are subjected. But “never did He yield to temptation to do one single act which was not pure and elevating and ennobling.”⁵⁵

Ellen White explains: “To the multitude, and afterward more fully to His disciples, Jesus explained that defilement comes not from without, but from within. Purity and impurity pertain to the soul. It is the evil deed, the evil word, the evil thought, the transgression of the law of God, not the neglect of external, man-made ceremonies, that defiles a man.”⁵⁶ “If the law extended to the outward conduct only, men would not be guilty in their wrong thoughts, desires, and designs. But the law requires that the soul itself be pure and the mind holy, that the thoughts and feelings may be in accordance with the standard of love and righteousness.”⁵⁷

“Unless there is a possibility of yielding, temptation is no temptation. Temptation is resisted when a man is powerfully influenced to do a wrong action, and, knowing that he can do it, resists by faith, with a firm hold upon divine power. That was the ordeal through which Christ passed.”⁵⁸

“In taking upon Himself man’s nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin. . . . We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ.”⁵⁹ This does not mean that His nature was sinless in itself—which would contradict all she had written elsewhere—but in the sense that because of His perfect obedience, He had made it sinless “by condemning sin in the flesh.”

Both Divine and Human

The reality of the Incarnation does not mean that Jesus renounced His divinity. Ellen White was accustomed to saying that “He clothed His divinity with His humanity,” or that He “veiled His divinity with humanity.” This type of expression is found as much as 125 times in her writings.⁶⁰ Here are a few examples: “For our sake He stepped down from His royal throne, and clothed His

divinity with humanity. He laid aside His royal robe, His kingly crown, that He might be one with us.”⁶¹

“Christ had not exchanged His divinity for humanity; but He had clothed His divinity in humanity.”⁶² “He veiled His divinity with the garb of humanity, but He did not part with His divinity.”⁶³ “Though He took humanity upon Himself, He was divine. All that is attributed to the Father Himself is attributed to Christ.”⁶⁴ “In Him God Himself came down from heaven.”⁶⁵

In a commentary on the visit of Jesus to the Temple at Jerusalem, she writes: “The second temple was honored, not with the cloud of Jehovah’s glory but with the living presence of One in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead bodily—God Himself manifest in the flesh.”⁶⁶ “This is why, although He was tempted in all points like as we are, He stood before the world, from His first entrance into it, untainted by corruption, though surrounded by it.”⁶⁷

Having said that, Ellen White then asks this question: “Are we not also to become partakers of that fullness, and is it not thus, and thus only, that we can overcome as He overcame?”⁶⁸ In fact, “He withstood the temptation, through the power that man may command. He laid hold on the throne of God, and there is not a man or woman who may not have access to the same help through faith in God.”⁶⁹

“Christ in the weakness of humanity was to meet the temptations of one possessing the powers of the higher nature that God had bestowed on the angelic family. But Christ’s humanity was united with divinity, and in this strength He would bear all the temptations that Satan could bring against Him, and yet keep His soul untainted by sin. And this power to overcome He would give to every son and daughter of Adam who would accept by faith the righteous attributes of His character.”⁷⁰

Partaker of the Divine Nature

Ellen White has specially emphasized the possibility offered to humanity to “participate in the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). This is the purpose for which Christ came into this world. He came to bring men the power of God to deliver them from the power of sin, and to make them children of God. To this end Christ had to par-

ticipate in the fallen nature of man so that we might be able to participate in His divine nature.

“He [Christ] took our nature and overcame, that we through taking His nature might overcome. Made ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom. 8:3, KJV), He lived a sinless life.”⁷¹ For “the life that Christ lived in this world, men and women can live through His power and under His instruction. In their conflict with Satan they may have all the help that He had. They may be more than conquerors through Him who loved them and gave Himself for them.”⁷²

In His humanity Christ triumphed over sin through the power of God on which He laid hold. Every member of the human family has the privilege of doing that. “Christ did nothing that human nature may not do if it partakes of the divine nature.”⁷³ “He exercised in His own behalf no power that is not freely offered to us. As man, He met temptation, and overcame in the strength given Him from God.”⁷⁴

“If Christ had a special power which it is not the privilege of man to have, Satan would have made capital of this matter.”⁷⁵ According to Ellen White, “Satan declared that it was impossible for the sons and daughters of Adam to keep the law of God,”⁷⁶ making the responsibility rebound on the lawgiver and not on man. But “He [Christ] came to this world to be tempted in all points as we are, to prove to the universe that in this world of sin human beings can live lives that God will approve.”⁷⁷ “The Lord Jesus came to our world, not to reveal what a God could do, but what a man could do, through faith in God’s power to help in every emergency. Man is, through faith, to be a partaker in the divine nature, and to overcome every temptation wherewith he is beset.”⁷⁸

Ellen White consistently taught that the work of salvation accomplished by Jesus Christ was not confined to a single purely legal act, the pardon of our sins, but that this work also includes victory over temptation and sin. “Christ came to make us ‘partakers of the divine nature,’ and His life declares that humanity, combined with divinity, does not commit sin.”⁷⁹

“It was a solemn reality that Christ came to fight the battles as man, in man’s behalf. His temptation and victory tell us that humanity must copy the Pattern; man must become a partaker of

the divine nature.”⁸⁰ “His life testified that by the aid of the same divine power which Christ received, it is possible for man to obey God’s law.”⁸¹

Obviously, this test would not have been effective if Jesus had lived a sinless life in a human nature different from ours—that is, in Adam’s nature before the Fall. This explains why, with perfect logic, Ellen White affirmed that “the great work of redemption could be carried out only by the Redeemer taking the place of fallen Adam.”⁸²

Conclusion

Ellen White wrote extensively on a wide variety of topics, such as dietetics, health, education, theology, medical work, gospel preaching, and many more.⁸³ Nevertheless, her favorite subject was undoubtedly the person and work of Jesus. Although she does not treat Christological themes in a systematic manner, they saturate her writings.

As she has stated it so well: “Christ, His character and work, is the center and circumference of all truth; He is the chain upon which the jewels of doctrine are linked. In Him is found the complete system of truth.”⁸⁴ For this reason, she writes, “The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God.”⁸⁵

As we can see, the core of Ellen White’s Christology is based on the mediatorial work of Jesus Christ for the sake of reconciling sinful human beings with God Himself. She is in perfect harmony with Paul, who says that this reconciliation is possible because of the incarnation of Christ “in the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3, KJV).

We can think of no better summary of Ellen White’s Christology than her commentary on the Sermon on the Mount: “Christ is the ladder that Jacob saw, the base resting on the earth, and the topmost round reaching to the gate of heaven, on the very threshold of glory. If that ladder had failed by a single step of reaching the earth, we should have been lost. But Christ reaches us where we are. He took our nature and overcame, that we through taking His nature might overcome. Made ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh’ (Rom. 8:3), He lived a sinless life. Now by His divinity He lays hold

upon the throne of heaven, while by His humanity He reaches us. He bids us by faith in Him attain to the glory of the character of God. Therefore are we to be perfect, even as our 'Father which is in heaven is perfect.'"⁸⁶

To Ellen White, Christ manifested in "the likeness of sinful flesh" constitutes the condition without which there can be no reconciliation with God. "The completeness of His humanity, the perfection of His divinity, form for us a strong ground upon which we may be brought into reconciliation with God."⁸⁷

References and Notes

¹ Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 242-289.

² *Ibid.*, p. 244.

³ ———, in *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 5, 1915.

⁴ When Ellen White died in 1915, her works included 24 books published and translated in many languages, with two others ready for publication, 4,600 articles and numerous pamphlets on several subjects, and about 45,000 handwritten pages. Since her death many books were published in the form of compilations.

⁵ ———, in *Review and Herald*, Apr. 5, 1906. Quoted in *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 247.

⁶ Ellen G. White letter 97, 1898.

⁷ E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, July 5, 1887.

⁸ Ellen G. White manuscript 210, 1895.

⁹ Ellen G. White letter 32, 1899. Quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1130.

¹⁰ E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Dec. 11, 1888.

¹¹ ———, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 49, 50.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 50, 51.

¹³ ———, in *Signs of the Times*, June 17, 1897.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Oct. 17, 1900.

¹⁵ ———, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 117. This comparison was already made in *Review and Herald*, July 28, 1874. See *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 267, 268.

¹⁷ ———, in *Review and Herald*, Feb. 24, 1874. (Italics supplied.)

¹⁸ Ellen G. White manuscript 141, 1901. Quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 7, p. 926. (Italics supplied.)

¹⁹ Ellen G. White manuscript 57, 1890. (Italics supplied.)

²⁰ Ellen G. White letter 106, 1896.

²¹ E. G. White, in *Bible Echo* (published by the Australasian Division), Dec. 15, 1892.

²² ———, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 267, 268.

²³ ———, in *General Conference Bulletin*, Apr. 23, 1901.

²⁴ ———, in *Youth's Instructor*, Dec. 20, 1900.

²⁵ ———, in *Review and Herald*, Sept. 4, 1900. (Italics supplied.)

²⁶ Ellen G. White manuscript 143, 1897.

²⁷ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117.

- ²⁸ Ellen G. White manuscript 80, 1903.
- ²⁹ E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 226.
- ³⁰ Ellen G. White manuscript 141, 1901. (Italics supplied.)
- ³¹ E. G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, vol. 4, pp. 115, 116.
- ³² ———, in *Review and Herald*, July 17, 1900.
- ³³ ———, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 230.
- ³⁴ ———, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1942), p. 71.
- ³⁵ ———, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), p. 177.
- ³⁶ ———, *Youth's Instructor*, Apr. 1873.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, Oct. 26, 1899. Quoted in *Selected Messages*, book 3, pp. 131, 132.
- ³⁸ ———, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1952), p. 78.
- ³⁹ Ellen G. White letter 17, 1878.
- ⁴⁰ E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 94, 95.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.
- ⁴² ———, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 116.
- ⁴³ Ellen G. White letter 8, 1895. Quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, pp. 1128, 1129.
- ⁴⁴ E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 408.
- ⁴⁵ ———, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117.
- ⁴⁶ ———, in *Youth's Instructor*, June 2, 1898. Quoted in *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 256.
- ⁴⁷ Ellen G. White letter 8, 1895. Quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White comments, vol. 5, p. 1128.
- ⁴⁸ E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Nov. 8, 1887.
- ⁴⁹ ———, *Welfare Ministry* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), p. 287.
- ⁵⁰ ———, *Youth's Instructor*, June 2, 1898.
- ⁵¹ ———, in *Signs of the Times*, May 10, 1899.
- ⁵² ———, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 761.
- ⁵³ ———, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 71.
- ⁵⁴ ———, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 155.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ ———, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 397.
- ⁵⁷ ———, in *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1898.
- ⁵⁸ ———, in *Youth's Instructor*, July 20, 1899.
- ⁵⁹ ———, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 256.
- ⁶⁰ Eric Claude Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology*, p. 76.
- ⁶¹ E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Oct. 24, 1899.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, Oct. 29, 1895. Quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White comments, vol. 5, p. 1128.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, June 15, 1905.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, June 19, 1896.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Feb. 1, 1898.
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Jan. 16, 1908.
- ⁶⁷ Ellen G. White manuscript 16, 1890. Quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 7, p. 907.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 409.
- ⁷⁰ ———, in *Review and Herald*, Jan. 28, 1909. Quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist*

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⁷¹ ———, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 311, 312.

⁷² ———, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 22.

⁷³ ———, in *Signs of the Times*, June 17, 1897.

⁷⁴ ———, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 24.

⁷⁵ ———, *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 139.

⁷⁶ ———, in *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 16, 1896.

⁷⁷ ———, in *Review and Herald*, Mar. 9, 1905.

⁷⁸ Ellen G. White manuscript 1, 1892. Quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 7, p. 929.

⁷⁹ E. G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 180.

⁸⁰ ———, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 408.

⁸¹ Ellen G. White manuscript 141, 1901. Quoted in *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 132.

⁸² E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Feb. 24, 1874.

⁸³ See *The Index to the Writings of E. G. White* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1983), in which we find alphabetically classified the various subjects dealt with in Ellen G. White's writings.

⁸⁴ E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Aug. 15, 1893.

⁸⁵ ———, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244.

⁸⁶ ———, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 311, 312.

⁸⁷ Ellen G. White letter 35, 1894. Quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7-A, p. 487.

ELLET J. WAGGONER (1855-1916)

When in 1884 E. J. Waggoner took on, for the first time, the question of the human nature of Jesus, Ellen White had already expressed herself very clearly on the subject. At the time no one doubted that Christ, in His incarnation, had taken upon Himself man's fallen nature.

If Waggoner felt compelled to affirm that conviction, it was because he considered this truth to be indispensable to the understanding of the plan of salvation in general, and justification by faith in particular. Waggoner's purpose was not to confirm Ellen White's point of view, but to use her Christology as the foundation for his message about the righteousness obtained through the One who came "in the likeness of sinful flesh."

First Statements Made Between 1884 and 1888

In 1884, as soon as he was appointed assistant editor of the *Signs of the Times*, Waggoner penned a series of articles regarding the human nature of Jesus. There, he affirmed that Christ came into this world in the same condition as sinful man, while remaining perfectly righteous and holy.

In his first article of July 3, 1884, entitled "Condemned and Justified," we read, "Christ was sinless; the law was in His heart. As the Son of God His life was worth more than those of all created beings, whether in heaven or on earth. . . . He took upon Himself our nature (Heb. 2:16, 17, KJV); and on Him was laid 'the iniquity of

us all' (Isa. 53:6, KJV). In order to save us, He had to come where we were, or, in other words, He had to take the position of a lost sinner. . . . And because Christ was 'numbered with the transgressors,' He suffered the penalty of transgression. But the suffering of Christ was not on His own account. He 'did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth' (1 Peter 2:22, KJV)."¹

In the second article, entitled "A New Creature in Christ," Waggoner wrote, "God made Christ (the sinless one) to be sin for us. He was made in all things 'like unto his brethren'; and that means not simply as to the outward, physical frame, but that He bore sin, just as we do. The sins that He bore were not His own, but ours. He 'knew no sin, yet the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all' (Isa. 53:6, KJV). Although the sins that He bore were ours, they were counted as His own, and so caused His death (Isa. 53:5)."²

In a third article, bearing the title "Under the Law," Waggoner reaffirms that Jesus "had to put Himself in the exact condition of those whom He would save." This by no means implied that Jesus was a sinner. Christ was counted among sinners, although He was not one of them. "He bore the sins of the world as though they were His own."³

For Waggoner, the expression "made under the law" (Gal. 4:4, KJV) meant not only that Christ was subject to the law, but that He was subject to the condemnation of the law as a sinner. Christ put Himself in the place of those who had violated the law and who were condemned to death. That is why Christ suffered the condemnation of the law.

In his tract *The Gospel in the Epistle to the Galatians*, published at the beginning of 1888, Waggoner gave special consideration to Galatians 4:4, John 1:14, and Romans 8:3, all dealing with the question of Christ in the flesh. From these texts he concludes that "Christ was born in the likeness of sinful flesh."⁴ His comments on Philippians 2:5-7, Romans 1:3, Hebrews 2:9, 16, 17, and 2 Corinthians 5:21 also identify Christ's human nature with that of sinful humanity.

Far from considering the subject disturbing, the abasement of Jesus was for Waggoner a subject of encouragement that he had to share with his readers. "One of the most encouraging teachings of

Scripture is that Christ took on Him the nature of man; and that His ancestors according to the flesh were sinners. When we study the lives of the ancestors of Christ, and see that they had all the weaknesses and passions that we have, we find that no man has any right to excuse his sinful acts on the ground of heredity. If Christ had not been made *in all things* like unto His brethren, then His sinless life would be no encouragement to us. We might look at it with admiration, but it would be an admiration that brings hopeless despair.”⁵

“Paul declares that God did make him to be sin for us,” states Waggoner. “I simply give Scripture facts; I don’t attempt to explain them. ‘Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.’ I cannot understand how God could be manifest in the flesh, and in the likeness of sinful flesh. I do not know how the pure and holy Saviour could endure all the infirmities of humanity, which are the result of sin, and be reckoned as a sinner, and suffer the death of a sinner. I simply accept the Scripture statement that only so could He be the Saviour of men; and I rejoice in that knowledge, because since He was made sin, I may be made the righteousness of God in Him.”⁶

For Christ “went to the very lowest depths to which man had fallen, in order that He might lift man to His own exalted throne; yet He never ceased to be God, or lost a particle of His holiness.”⁷

These are the main thoughts developed by Waggoner in his first writings dealing with the human nature of Jesus. As they relate to the divinity of Christ, Waggoner erects upon them the foundations upon which he structured his message of justification by faith, presented at the General Conference session of Minneapolis in 1888.

“God Manifest in Flesh”

As stated earlier, no texts of Waggoner’s discourses presented at the Minneapolis session are extant. But clearly, his articles published in the *Signs of the Times* immediately after the session should be representative of his presentations. The session ended on November 4, 1888, and as early as January 21, 1889, the first article appeared concerning “God manifest in flesh.”⁸ Its content was reprinted entirely under the same title in his book published in 1890: *Christ and His Righteousness*.⁹

Waggoner begins his book with a discourse on Christ’s divinity,

then discusses His humanity, using only the Bible to present “the marvelous history of the humanity of Christ.” He opens by quoting John 1:14 to emphasize that “Christ was both God and man. Originally only Divine, He took upon Himself human nature, and passed among men as only a common mortal.”¹⁰

This voluntary humiliation of Christ is best expressed by Paul, according to Waggoner, in Philippians 2:5-8. “It is impossible,” he writes, “for us to understand how Christ could, as God, humble Himself to the death of the cross, and it is worse than useless for us to speculate about it. All we can do is to accept the facts as they are presented in the Bible.”¹¹

To make clear the meaning of what happened when “the Word was made flesh,” Waggoner quotes Romans 8:3, 4. “A little thought will be sufficient to show anybody that if Christ took upon Himself the likeness of man, in order that He might redeem man, it must have been sinful man that He was made like, for it is sinful man that He came to redeem. . . . Moreover, the fact that Christ took upon Himself the flesh, not of a sinless being, but of sinful man, that is, the flesh which He assumed had all the weakness and sinful tendencies to which fallen human nature is subject, is shown by the statement, that He ‘was of the seed of David *according to the flesh.*’ David had all the passions of human nature. He said of himself, ‘Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me’ (Ps. 51:5).”¹²

For Waggoner, the text of Hebrews 2:16-18 confirms this position: “If He [Christ] was made in all things like unto His brethren, then He must have suffered all the infirmities, and been subject to all the temptations, of His brethren.”¹³ Paul takes it even further when he writes in 2 Corinthians 5:21 that “God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” Waggoner adds: “The spotless Lamb of God, who knew no sin, was made to be sin. Sinless, yet not only counted as a sinner but actually taking upon Himself sinful nature. *He* was made to be sin in order that *we* might be made righteous.”¹⁴

After quoting once more Galatians 4:4, 5, Hebrews 2:18, and Hebrews 4:15, 16, Waggoner remarks, “Some may have thought, while reading thus far, that we were depreciating the character of

Jesus, by bringing Him down to the level of sinful man.”¹⁵ “On the contrary,” he said, “we are simply exalting the ‘Divine power’ of our blessed Saviour, who Himself voluntarily descended to the level of sinful man, in order that He might exalt man to His own spotless purity, which He retained under the most adverse circumstances.”¹⁶

In spite of the weakness of the flesh, “His Divine nature never for a moment harbored an evil desire, nor did His Divine power for a moment waver. Having suffered in the flesh all that men can possibly suffer, He returned to the throne of His Father as spotless as when He left the courts of glory.”¹⁷

The secret of Christ’s victory over sin resides in this logic. “He was ‘compassed with infirmity,’ yet He ‘did no sin,’ because of the Divine power constantly dwelling within Him. Now this same power can be ours if ‘*Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith*’; if, like Christ ‘*ye might be filled with all the fulness of God*’ (Eph. 3:17, 19).”¹⁸

“Having suffered all that human flesh is heir to, He [Christ] knows all about it, and so closely does He identify Himself with His children that whatever presses upon them makes a like impression upon Him, and knows how much Divine power is necessary to resist it; and if we but sincerely desire to deny ‘ungodliness and worldly lusts,’ He is able and anxious to give to us strength ‘exceeding abundantly, above all that we ask and think.’ All the power which Christ had dwelling in Him by nature, we may have dwelling in us by grace, for He freely bestows it upon us.”¹⁹

“What wonderful possibilities there are for us as Christians!” exclaims Waggoner. Henceforth he could say: “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”²⁰

Such is Waggoner’s reasoning on the subject of “God manifest in flesh.” In order to conquer the power of sin, it was necessary, according to him, that Christ should come “to dwell” in “the likeness of sinful flesh.” Having conquered sin in the flesh, He could now grant His power to all those who would accept it. Thus the same divine power that empowered Christ to live a sinless life in sinful human nature made the sinner in whom Christ dwelt capable of overcoming temptation and conquering the power of sin.

As can be seen, Waggoner’s Christology led him quite naturally

to justification by faith. Christ's work could not be separated from His person. The message of justification by faith as presented by Waggoner in 1888 is in reality only a practical application of his Christology. Because Christ perfectly identified Himself with fallen human nature, His work in us is not limited to a mere legal transaction, the pardon for sin, but it also contains the cleansing from "all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).²¹ "When Christ covers us with the robe of His own righteousness, He does not furnish a cloak for sin, but takes the sin away. . . . It actually clears him from guilt; and if he is cleared from guilt, is justified, made righteous, he has certainly undergone a radical change. He is, indeed, another person. . . . 'He is a new creature' (2 Cor. 5:17)." ²²

Waggoner's great achievement was not only to reintroduce the principle of justification by faith in the Adventist Church but also to apply Christology to the work of salvation. For Luther, justification by faith was purely a legal transaction. The Formula of Concord confirms this point of view: "All of our righteousness is outside of us; it dwells entirely in Jesus Christ." For Waggoner, on the other hand, justification includes the action of Christ in man to make him righteous (Rom. 5:19, KJV) through the power which God grants to him who believes in Christ and receives Him in his heart (John 1:12, KJV).

In his last book, *The Everlasting Covenant*, published in London in 1900, Waggoner makes this statement: "Before the end comes, and at the time of the coming of Christ, there must be a people on earth, not necessarily large in proportion to the number of inhabitants of earth, but large enough to be known in all the earth, in whom 'all the fulness of God' will be manifest even as it was in Jesus of Nazareth. God will demonstrate to the world that what He did with Jesus of Nazareth He can do with anyone who will yield to Him."²³

Waggoner Confirms His Christology (1891-1902)

During the 1890s Waggoner enjoyed a great deal of authority in the Adventist Church. Supported by Ellen White and in collaboration with his colleague A. T. Jones, he was given the opportunity to present the message of justification by faith at camp meetings, in

large pastoral conventions, and at various General Conference sessions.

At the 1891 General Conference session Waggoner was invited to present a series of 16 Bible studies, which he devoted to the Epistle of Romans.²⁴ He could scarcely have chosen a more favorable Epistle to develop the major ideas of his message of justification by faith. Two passages in particular were relevant to the topic of the human nature of Jesus.

Paul's declaration in Romans 1:3 about the posterity of David offered him the first opportunity. Paul says that Jesus Christ was "made of the seed of David according to the flesh." Waggoner, therefore, invites us "to read the history of David, and of the kings who descended from him, who became the ancestors of Jesus, and you will see that on the human side the Lord was handicapped by his ancestry as badly as anyone can ever be. Many of them were licentious and cruel idolaters. Although Jesus was thus compassed with infirmity, he 'did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth' (1 Peter 2:22, KJV). This is to give courage to men in the lowest condition of life. It is to show that the power of the gospel of the grace of God can triumph over heredity."²⁵

With regard to the statement that God sent His Son "in the likeness of sinful flesh," Waggoner states, "There is a common idea that this means that Christ simulated sinful flesh, that he did not take upon himself actual sinful flesh, but only what appeared to be such."²⁶

In rebuttal Waggoner quoted Hebrews 2:17, which affirms that Jesus had "to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Then he quoted Galatians 4:4, 5 again, where Paul claims that Jesus was "made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law." Hence Waggoner's conclusion: "He took the same flesh that all have who are born of woman."²⁷

Finally, to establish the reason for Christ coming in the likeness of sinful flesh, Waggoner places side by side Romans 8:3, 4 and 2 Corinthians 5:21. "The former says that Christ was sent in the likeness of sinful flesh, 'that the righteousness of the law might be

fulfilled in us.' The latter says that God 'made him to be sin for us,' although he knew no sin, 'that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.'"²⁸

In all these explanations Waggoner constantly links the incarnation of Christ, who took upon Himself humanity's fallen nature, with the purpose of redemption: to free human beings from the power of sin and death by the power of the Spirit of life which is in Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:2).

In 1892 Waggoner accepted a call to go to England to become the editor of the magazine *Present Truth*. He stayed there until 1902. During that time he was invited to take part in the General Conference session of 1897, where he presented 19 studies based on the first chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews. This is no surprise, considering that these chapters contain the clearest evidence of the divine and human nature of Christ.²⁹ Once more Waggoner had the opportunity to propagate his Christology, which also agreed with that of the executives of the General Conference Committee and of the church. If that were not the case, they would not have chosen to invite Waggoner all the way from England for this special event.

Once again Waggoner repeated his former position, which we have already examined, on the human nature of Jesus. At one point he paraphrased the apostle Paul: "If we shall confess with our mouth the Lord Jesus, that He is come in our flesh, and shall believe in our heart that God hath raised him from the dead—that He is a living power, we shall be saved."³⁰

To make sure that his public was clear on the point, Waggoner insisted, "The Word was made perfect flesh in Adam, but in Christ was the Word made fallen flesh. Christ goes down to the bottom, and there is the Word flesh, sinful flesh."³¹

In an article in *Signs of the Times* entitled "God Manifested in Flesh," Waggoner stipulates that our sins were not laid on Christ in a symbolic manner, but that they were really laid on Him.³² Likewise in his commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, published in 1900, he underlines emphatically that Christ bore our sins "in his own body" (1 Peter 2:24). "Our sins," he wrote, "were not merely figuratively laid on Him, but were 'in his own body.' He was 'made

a curse' for us, 'made to be sin' for us, and consequently suffered death for us. . . . The same text that tells us that He carried our sins 'in his own body,' is careful to let us know that He 'did no sin.' The fact that He could carry our sin about with Him and in Him, being actually made to be sin for us, and yet not do any sin, is to His everlasting glory and our eternal salvation from sin."³³

Conclusion

Such is the essential of Waggoner's Christology. If his position had not been in agreement with the belief of the church, the General Conference Committee would not have invited him to the 1901 session to refute "the strange doctrine" of the holy flesh movement, according to which Christ had taken "the nature of Adam before the fall."³⁴

If there is a recurring theme in Waggoner's teaching, it is certainly his Christology. His *Confession of Faith*, written shortly before his death in 1916, remains the best evidence of that reality. There he expresses again the paradox of Christ who took on the nature "of sinful man" while offering a "perfect life"—a life free from sin, a life victorious over death. "So God in Christ gave His life for and to sinful men. That is, according to Waggoner, the sum of the gospel."³⁵

References and Notes

¹ Ellet J. Waggoner, in *Signs of the Times*, July 3, 1884.

² *Ibid.*, July 17, 1884.

³ *Ibid.*, Sept. 18, 1884. See Eric Claude Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology*, pp. 168-171.

⁴ Ellet J. Waggoner, *The Gospel in the Book of Galatians* (Payson, Ariz.: Leaves of Autumn Books, 1970), p. 60. Waggoner wrote this 71-page pamphlet in answer to an 85-page pamphlet put out by G. I. Butler entitled *The Law in the Book of Galatians*.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁸ Seven articles were published in *Signs of the Times*. The first one was on the human nature of Christ (Jan. 21, 1889); the next four were on the divinity of Christ (March 1, 8, 15, and 22, 1889); the last two were entitled "Christ, the Legislator" and "Christ, the Redeemptor."

⁹ This book was likewise reprinted in Australia and in England, 1892; and in Hamburg and Basel. See Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, p. 373. In 1989 it was translated and published in France.

¹⁰ Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, p. 24.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 26, 27.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 28.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 30, 31.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

²³ ———, *The Everlasting Covenant*, p. 366. Arthur G. Daniells recommended Waggoner's *Everlasting Covenant* to W. C. White in a letter dated May 12, 1902: "I am deeply convinced that something ought to be done to place a flood of light in the homes of our people. I know of no better book to do this, outside of the Bible, than Brother Waggoner's" (quoted in A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory*, p. 231).

²⁴ E. J. Waggoner, in *General Conference Bulletin*, 1891; *Signs of the Times*, October 1895 and September 1896; *Waggoner on Romans, the Gospel in Paul's Great Letter* (Paris: Glad Tidings Publishers, n.d.).

²⁵ ———, *Waggoner on Romans*, p. 12.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ These studies are published in the *General Conference Bulletin*, 1897, under the title "Studies in the Book of Hebrews."

³⁰ *General Conference Bulletin*, 1897, Vol. II, p. 12.

³¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 57.

³² E. J. Waggoner, in *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 21, 1889.

³³ ———, *The Glad Tidings*, p. 62.

³⁴ This event will be considered in chapter 7.

³⁵ *Confession of Faith*, pp. 8, 10. See Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology*, pp. 222, 223.

ALONZO T. JONES (1850-1923)¹

Enthusiastic preacher, editor of several journals,² and author of various works,³ Alonzo T. Jones was one of the foremost spiritual leaders of the Adventist Church in the 1890s.

He was born on April 21, 1850, at Rockhill, Ohio. At the age of 20 he enlisted in the army for three years. From that experience he retained a spirit of discipline and a certain brusqueness in his relationships. While the majority of his comrades would seek amusement during their free time, Jones preferred reading works of history or Adventist publications, along with the Bible. He thus acquired much of the basic knowledge needed for his future work as a preacher and writer.

Freed from his military obligations, he requested baptism into the Adventist Church. He was then appointed to the West Coast as a preacher. In May 1885 he was employed as assistant editor for the journal *Signs of the Times*, a position which he held at the side of Ellet J. Waggoner until 1889.

Although quite different one from the other, these two men collaborated very closely in preaching the message of justification by faith. With Ellen White's support, they revolutionized the General Conference session of 1888 at Minneapolis. As a result, for two years the General Conference Committee assigned Waggoner and Jones to teach this message in camp meetings, pastoral conventions, institutions, and churches throughout the country. Until she sailed for Australia in December 1891, Ellen White often accompanied them in

these campaigns. She considered their message as coming from God.

After Waggoner's departure for England in 1892, Jones was left to sustain the interest in the 1888 message. He accomplished this in masterly fashion, and with the full approval of the church leaders. During the 1890s at each session of the General Conference a preferential position was reserved for him to present the various aspects of the "third angel's message," as the collection of his Bible studies was popularly known.

Because of his interest in religious liberty, Jones had been chosen in 1889 to take charge over the journal *American Sentinel*. In 1897 he was asked to serve as a member of the General Conference Committee, and at the same time as editor in chief of the *Review and Herald*. Then, at the 1901 session of the General Conference he was appointed president of the California Conference, a position he held until 1903.

Jones was then invited to take charge of the Department of Religious Liberty at the General Conference level in Washington. He at first accepted the invitation, then declined, and went to Battle Creek to work in association with Dr. J. H. Kellogg, under whose influence he came into conflict with the General Conference. As a result he ceased denominational employment. Eventually, in light of a growing hostility to church leadership, he was disfellowshipped in 1909.

Before this separation, however, A. G. Daniells, president of the General Conference, attempted a reconciliation at the 1909 session. For some reason Jones rejected this overture. From then on, though a Sabbathkeeper who continued to adhere to most fundamental Adventist doctrines, he remained on the fringes of the church. Moreover, as his biographer George R. Knight remarks: "Despite his animosity toward the organized church, Jones seemed to long for Adventist companionship."⁴ He died on May 12, 1923, at Battle Creek following a cerebral hemorrhage.

Is the Message of Jones Still Credible?

Because of his later separation from the church, some Adventists today seriously question the value or validity of Jones's message. Indeed, as a general rule, the message of one who does not remain

steadfast in the faith to the end tends to lose all credibility.⁵

In Jones's case, however, his separation occurred primarily because of his conflict with the organization, not with the faith. George R. Knight writes: "Having studied his life for several years, I find it almost impossible to believe that the mighty Jones of the early 1890s could have shipwrecked his faith. On the other hand, it seems almost impossible—given his pride, headstrong opinions, and extremism—for him to have done anything else. The key to his future lay in the message that was so close to his heart—to let the power of the Holy Spirit transform his life through faith. It was on that point that he failed. He had a correct theory of the truth, but he failed in its practice."⁶

Likewise, Ellen White stressed the difference between the message and the messenger. She had a good understanding of both. She had accepted the message as inspired from heaven. She did not hesitate to preach it herself. But because of the opposition which Jones and Waggoner had to face, she feared that they would be discouraged and eventually "overthrown by the temptations of the enemy." However, she cautions: "If they should be, this would not prove that they had had no message from God, or that the work that they had done was all a mistake."⁷

This testimony is all the more noteworthy, considering the circumstances which unfortunately later justified Ellen White's fears concerning the messengers. Indeed, she never doubted the origin of the basic message preached by Jones and Waggoner, though at times she corrected them on particular points.⁸ Having read in Australia the 24 Bible studies presented by Jones at the 1893 session of the General Conference, Ellen White wrote: "We know that Brother Jones has given the message for this time—meat in due season for the starving flock of God. Those who do not allow prejudice to bar the heart against the heaven-sent message, cannot but feel the spirit and force of the truth."⁹

Jones also enjoyed the confidence of the leaders of the church, according to Arthur L. White: "Perhaps the true attitude of the church and its leaders towards Jones and Waggoner after the 1888 conference session is best reflected by the invitations extended to

these two men to conduct Bible studies at the General Conference sessions held during the next ten years. It must be remembered that the General Conference Committee was responsible for planning General Conference sessions and choosing the speakers. The church organization had many able preachers. The choices made reveal the sentiments of church leaders.”¹⁰

Just a glance at the impressive count of Bible studies presented by Waggoner and Jones at the various sessions of the General Conference from 1891 to 1899 will suffice to establish the level of trust they enjoyed: 17 by Waggoner in 1891; 24 by Jones in 1893; 26 by Jones in 1895; 19 by Waggoner and 11 by Jones in 1897; 3 by Waggoner and 7 by Jones in 1899. These men would never have been asked to present as they did, the various aspects of the third angel’s message, if their discourse had not been in harmony with the beliefs of the church.

The Christology of Jones

Jones spoke profusely about Christ’s human nature; first in numerous articles in the *Review and Herald*, of which he was chief editor;¹¹ later in the Bible studies presented at the General Conference sessions of 1893 and 1895, under the title “The third angel’s message”;¹² and finally in a small book, *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection*,¹³ published at the end of his ministry in 1905.

Within the scope of this study it is impossible to enter into all the details of the message expounded by Jones. It will suffice here to define the main points of his Christology. First, let us establish clearly that Jones always presented Christ as God. For him, “so entirely is His nature of the nature of God, that it is the very impress of the *substance* of God.” “He is God.”¹⁴ Jones declared: “It is essential to know the first chapter of Hebrews, in order to know what is His nature revealed in the second chapter of Hebrews *as man*.”¹⁵

In his 1893 presentations Jones confirmed Waggoner’s teaching on justification by faith. He affirmed that “Jesus took part of the same flesh and blood that we have.”¹⁶ And, in his tenth study he explained how God had woven in Christ “the robe of righteousness,” available to clothe those who accept Him.

Jones declared: "That garment was woven in a human body. The human body—the flesh of Christ—was the loom, was it not? That garment was woven in Jesus; in the same flesh that you and I have, for He took part of the same flesh and blood that we have. That flesh that is yours and mine, that Christ bore in this world—that was the loom in which God wove that garment for you and me to wear in the flesh, and He wants us to wear it now."¹⁷

The most complete and detailed presentations are those given by Jones at the 1895 General Conference session. Of the 26 studies, six are devoted to the doctrine of the Incarnation.¹⁸ In the course of these presentations Jones remarked that the nature of Christ had been the object of profound study for "three or four years," but that God was leading them "further along" in the subject.¹⁹ Jones believed he had new arguments capable of consolidating the teaching about the human nature of Christ.

The evidence suggests that after his arrival in England in 1892 Waggoner sent Jones the writings of Anglican bishop Edward Irving, well known for his Christology. It is quite clear that Jones had read Irving's works, and they had an influence on the arguments and expressions found in the 1895 presentations.²⁰

Jones's understanding of the human nature of Jesus and its practical applications for Christian life can be summarized in four main concepts:

1. The Fallen Human Nature of Christ

Jones had not the least doubt that Christ took upon Himself humanity's fallen, or sinful, nature—"the likeness of sinful flesh." This type of expression occurs no fewer than 90 times in his 1895 presentations.²¹

Not content with affirming the truth of this message, Jones wanted to explain its logic. To this end he began to emphasize the common origin of Christ's human nature and that of all humans. To demonstrate his point, he cited Hebrews 2:11: "Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family." On the basis of this verse, Jones concluded that "in His human nature Christ came from the man from whom we all have come. . . . One man is the source and head of all human nature. And the

genealogy of Christ, as one of us, runs to Adam. . . . All coming from one man according to the flesh, are all of one. Thus on the human side, Christ's nature is precisely our nature."²²

"What flesh is it really?" Jones probed. "What kind of flesh alone is it that this world knows? Just such flesh as you and I have. This world does not know any other flesh of man, and has not known any other since the necessity of Christ's coming was created. Wherefore, as this world knows only such flesh as we have, as it is now, it is certainly true that when 'the Word was made flesh,' He was made just such flesh as ours is. It cannot be otherwise."²³

Relying on the verses of Hebrews 2:14-18, Jones underlined the fact that Christ participated in the flesh and blood in the same manner that we participate in flesh and blood. "He took not on Him the nature of angels, but He took on Him the nature of Abraham. But the nature of Abraham and of the seed of Abraham is only human nature. . . . 'Therefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto his brethren.' In how many things? All things. Then in His human nature there is not a particle of difference between Him and you."²⁴

Jones inquires: "Don't you see that our salvation lies just there? Do you not see that it is right there where Christ comes to us? He came to us just where we are tempted, and was made like us just where we are tempted; and there is the point where we meet Him—the living Saviour against the power of temptation."²⁵

2. Sin Condemned in the Flesh

When Jones came to consider the temptations to which Christ had been subjected, he referred to Hebrews 4:15: "One who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin."

Obviously, declared Jones, "He could not have been tempted in all points like as I am, if He were not in all points like as I am to start with. . . . Christ was in *the place*, and He had *the nature*, of the whole human race. And in Him meet all the weaknesses of mankind, so that every man on the earth who can be tempted at all, finds in Jesus Christ power against that temptation. For every soul there is in Jesus Christ victory against all temptations, and relief from the power of it. That is the truth."²⁶

In his fourteenth study, Jones returned to that which every man has inherited from Adam. "So all the tendencies to sin that are in the human race came from Adam. But Jesus Christ felt all these temptations; He was tempted upon all these points in the flesh which He derived from David, from Abraham, and from Adam. . . . Thus in the flesh of Jesus Christ—not in Himself, but in His flesh—our flesh which He took in the human nature—there were just the same tendencies to sin that are in you and me. . . . And thus being in the likeness of sinful flesh, He condemned sin in the flesh."²⁷

Therefore, says Jones, "all the tendencies to sin that are in human flesh were in His human flesh, and not one of them was ever allowed to appear; He conquered them all. And in Him we all have victory over them all."²⁸

To clarify his explanation, Jones allows "a difference between a tendency to sin, and the open appearing of that sin in the actions."²⁹ In submitting to the great law of heredity, Christ accepted to be tempted in all points like we are, but without yielding to the power of temptation that He carried in His flesh. Therefore, Jones declares, "He is a complete Saviour. He is a Saviour from sins committed, and the Conqueror of the tendencies to commit sins. In Him we have the victory."³⁰

Jones stated that there would be no mystery if God were manifest in a flesh that was not subject to the power of sin. "But the wonder is that God can do that through and in *sinful* flesh. That is the mystery of God—God manifest in *sinful* flesh. In Jesus Christ as He was in sinful flesh, God has demonstrated before the universe that He can so take possession of sinful flesh as to manifest His own presence, His power, and His glory, instead of sin manifesting itself."³¹

3. The Nature of Adam: Before or After the Fall?

For Jones, this question should have never been raised. "A second Adam came, not as the first Adam was but as the first Adam had caused his descendants to be at the time in which He came. The second Adam came at the point in the degeneracy of the race to which the race had come from the first Adam."³² "Jesus came

here into Satan's territory, and took human nature at the point to which Satan himself had brought it."³³

It is quite apparent that some of the delegates did not understand how it was possible for Jesus to have "sinful flesh" without having been a sinner. Hence, questions arose which Jones was compelled to answer. Immediately he was forced to address the doctrine of the immaculate conception. "The false idea that He is so holy that it would be entirely unbecoming in Him to come near to us, and be possessed of such a nature as we have—sinful, depraved, fallen human nature—has its source in the incarnation of that enmity that is against God, and that separates between man and God—the papacy."³⁴

According to this doctrine, "therefore Mary must be born immaculate, perfect, sinless, and higher than the cherubim and seraphim; and then Christ must be so born of her as to take His human nature in absolute sinlessness from her. But that puts Him farther away from us than the cherubim and the seraphim are, and in a sinless nature. . . . I need someone to help me who knows something about sinful nature; for that is the nature that I have; and such the Lord did take. He became one of us."³⁵

Some delegates felt that Jones was going too far in saying that "Christ had the same passions as we have." They confronted him with a statement from Ellen White that "Christ is a brother in our infirmities, but not in the possession of the same passions." Jones answered by emphasizing the difference between the flesh of Jesus and His mind: "He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh; not in the likeness of sinful mind. Do not drag His mind into it. His flesh was our flesh; but the mind was 'the mind of Christ Jesus.' Therefore it is written: 'Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.'"³⁶

At the beginning, in the Garden of Eden, Jones explained, Adam and Eve had the mind of Jesus Christ. By allowing themselves to be seduced, they became "slaves" of Satan's spirit, and we after them. Jesus came therefore to fight the battle on Adam's own ground, where he lost it. And by His victory "in Jesus Christ the mind of God is brought back once more to the sons of men; and Satan is conquered."³⁷ "Jesus Christ came in just such flesh as ours, but with a mind that held its integrity against every temptation,

against every inducement to sin—a mind that never consented to sin—no, never in the least conceivable shadow of a thought.”³⁸

To support his argument, Jones cited a statement from an article in which Ellen White emphasizes the two natures of Jesus, human and divine, on the basis of Philippians 2:6, 7 and Hebrews 1:3.³⁹ Then Jones quoted from the manuscript for *The Desire of Ages*, then not yet in print and tentatively titled “Life of Christ”: “In order to carry out the great work of redemption, the Redeemer must take the place of fallen man. . . . In order to elevate fallen man, Christ must reach him where he stood. He assumed human nature, bearing the infirmities and degeneracy of the race. He humiliated Himself to the lowest depths of human woe, that He might sympathize with man and rescue him from the degradation into which sin had plunged him. . . . Christ took humanity with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man with the possibility of yielding to temptation, and He relied upon divine power to keep Him.”⁴⁰

Jones concluded: “You see, we are on firm ground all the way, so that when it is said that He [Christ] took our flesh, but still was not a partaker of our passions, it is all straight, it is all correct; because His divine mind never consented to sin. And this mind is brought *to us*, by the Holy Spirit that is freely given unto us.”⁴¹

Some have felt that Jones had in effect admitted that Christ did not have passions like us.⁴² Not at all. Jones did his very best to clarify the difference between hereditary tendencies to sin that are common to all of us, and guilty habits that we cultivate by yielding to temptation. Moreover, “The flesh of Jesus Christ was our flesh, and in it was all that is in our flesh—all the tendencies to sin that are in our flesh were in His flesh, drawing upon Him to get Him to consent to sin.”⁴³ Likewise, Jesus carried in His flesh our passions by heredity, in power, but never in deed. This is why Jones was able to say without contradicting himself: “That does not mean that Christ had *participated* in our passions.” He possessed our passions, but He had never participated in them. The whole problem of Christ’s human nature lies in the understanding of this difference.⁴⁴

4. Victory Possible Through Jesus Christ

Indeed, the victory of Jesus over sin in the flesh provides for Jones the demonstration that each of Christ's disciples can also conquer sin in the flesh. Ultimately, it was for this very purpose that God sent Jesus Christ: to condemn sin in the flesh "that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature, but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:2-4).

"In Jesus Christ as He was in sinful flesh, God has demonstrated before the universe that He can so take possession of sinful flesh as to manifest His own presence, His power, and His glory, instead of sin manifesting itself. And all that the Son asks of any man, in order to accomplish this in him, is that the man will let the Lord have him as the Lord Jesus."⁴⁵

As early as 1893 Jones had drawn this practical lesson from Christ's victory over sin: Just as God had woven the robe of righteousness in Christ's flesh, so "He [God] wants us to wear it now, as well as when the flesh is made immortal in the end. . . . Christ is to be in us, just as God was in Him, and His character is to be in us, just as God was in Him, and His character is to be woven and transformed into us through these sufferings and temptations and trials which we meet. And God is the weaver, but not without us. It is the cooperation of the divine and the human—the mystery of God in you and me—the same mystery that was in the gospel, and that is the third angel's message."⁴⁶

The same practical conclusion is drawn at the close of the seventeenth study in 1895. "According to His promise we are partakers of the divine nature."⁴⁷ And to the extent that we are dependent upon God, at any time, "the divine Spirit which was in Him [Jesus], and which is given to us, will restrain our natural self, our sinful self. . . . That is our victory," and the manner in which God destroys enmity for us.⁴⁸

The writing and preaching of A. T. Jones clarified one of the greatest truths of the 1888 message: that Christians can live victorious lives "through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life" (Rom. 8:2). It is true, according to Jones, that some are mistaken about the

meaning of this freedom, and have strayed sometimes into a regrettable perfectionism, as if victory over sin could be absolutely obtained, and the power of sin eradicated from the flesh.

Jones alluded to this in an 1899 article regarding the “holy flesh” movement condemned at the 1901 General Conference session (more on this later). His article, entitled “Sinful Flesh,” puts in perspective some of his statements on Christian perfection.

“There is a serious and very bothersome mistake, which is made by many persons. That mistake is made in thinking that when they are converted, their old sinful flesh is blotted out. In other words, they make the mistake of thinking that they are to be delivered from the flesh by having it taken away from them altogether. Then, when they find that this is not so, when they find that the same old flesh, with its inclinations, its besetments, and its enticements, is still there, they are not prepared for it, and so become discouraged, and are ready to think they never were converted at all.”⁴⁹

Jones goes on to explain that “conversion . . . does not put new flesh upon the old spirit; but a new spirit within the old flesh. It does not propose to bring new flesh to the old mind; but a new mind to the old flesh. Deliverance and victory are not gained by having the human nature taken away; but by receiving *the divine nature* to subdue and have dominion over the human. . . . The Scripture does not say, Be ye transformed by the renewing of your flesh; but it does say, Be ye transformed by the renewing of your *mind* (Rom. 12:2, KJV). We shall be translated by the renewing of our *flesh*; but we must be transformed by the renewing of our *minds*.”⁵⁰

Finally in 1905 Pacific Press published *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection*. Based on the Epistle to the Hebrews, the book recalls the essentials of Jones’s teaching on Christ’s human nature and the character perfection that each Christian may attain thanks to the ministry of Christ, our great high priest in the heavenly sanctuary. For “we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.” “He is able to help those who are being tempted” (Heb. 4:15; 2:18).

Conclusion

As George R. Knight has written, "A. T. Jones was one of the most influential voices in Adventism."⁵¹ Whatever his end might have been, his message has lost nothing of its value. His Christology in particular harmonizes perfectly with that of Ellen White and Waggoner.

Even if some of his expressions appear in terms rather too absolute, ultimately, when considered in the totality of his teaching, Jones said little that Ellen White had not previously taught on the subject.

At the close of his presentations in 1895, Ellen White wrote to the church at Battle Creek, in a letter dated May 1, 1895: "The Lord in His great mercy sent a most precious message to His people through Elders Waggoner and Jones. . . . Therefore God gave to His servants a testimony that presented the truth as it is in Jesus, which is the third angel's message, in clear, distinct lines."⁵²

Jones's message, considered as a whole, was at the time the best explanation of what came to be known as "the third angel's message,"⁵³ which earned him a privileged status among the leaders of the church throughout the 1890s. If such had not been the case, they would never have invited Jones to speak so often as they did. This message was none other than that of justification by faith, whereby the divine-human nature of Jesus Christ provides the means of reconciliation with God.⁵⁴

It is not without reason that Ellen White has so strongly called attention to the messages of Jones and Waggoner. It is important to bear in mind her warning: "It is quite possible that Elders Jones or Waggoner may be overthrown by the temptation of the enemy; but if they should be, this would not prove that they had had no message from God, or that the work that they had done was all a mistake. But should this happen, how many would take this position, and enter into a fatal delusion because they are not under the control of the Spirit of God."⁵⁵

Ellen White's fears, alas, were realized. Because the messengers failed, many today consider that their message was not of God, and seek to substitute for it a new message, which Ellen White described as a fatal delusion, because it was not based on the revelations of the Spirit of God. To emphasize further the certainty of this prediction,

Ellen White repeats it: "I know that this is the very position *many* would take if either of these men were to fall."⁵⁶ Strangely enough, as we shall see, that is exactly what happened.

References and Notes

¹ *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, p. 707. See also George R. Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy, the Case of A. T. Jones* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1987).

² *Signs of the Times, Review and Herald, and American Sentinel*.

³ *The Third Angel's Message*, sermons given at the General Conference session of 1895 by A. T. Jones, published by John O. Ford (Angwin, Calif.: Pacific Union College Press, 1977); *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905); *Lessons on Faith*, a selection of articles and sermons, published by John O. Ford (Angwin, Calif.: Pacific Union College Press, n.d.).

⁴ Knight, p. 255.

⁵ LeRoy Edwin Froom, in *Movement of Destiny*, ignores almost entirely the role and message of A. T. Jones.

⁶ Knight, p. 256.

⁷ Ellen G. White letter 24, 1892. Quoted in A. V. Olson, *Through Crisis to Victory*, pp. 315, 316.

⁸ For example, see Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 377-379.

⁹ Ellen G. White manuscript 1180. See Robert J. Wieland, *Ellen G. White Endorsements of the 1888 Message, as Brought by Jones and Waggoner* (St. Maries, Idaho, LMN Publishing, n.d.).

¹⁰ Arthur L. White, *Ellen White: The Lonely Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1984), pp. 412, 413.

¹¹ Alonzo T. Jones, in *Review and Herald*, Feb. 18, 1896; Nov. 16, 1897; Apr. 11 and 18, 1899; Dec. 4, 11, 18, and 25, 1900; Jan. 1 and 22, 1901.

¹² See *General Conference Bulletin*, 1893 and 1895.

¹³ Alonzo T. Jones, *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), reprinted by Upward Way, Dodge Center, Minnesota, 1988.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *General Conference Bulletin*, 1893, p. 207.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See *General Conference Bulletin*, 1895. The last 16 studies have been published by John O. Ford, *The Third Angel's Message, Sermons Given at the General Conference of 1895*, by A. T. Jones (Angwin, Calif.: Pacific Union College Press, 1977).

¹⁹ *General Conference Bulletin*, 1895, p. 330.

²⁰ See William H. Grotheer, *An Interpretive History of the Doctrine of Incarnation as Taught by SDA Church* (typescript), pp. 30, 32.

²¹ See Ralph Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh*, p. 67.

²² *General Conference Bulletin*, 1895, p. 231.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 232. "In this argument, Jones was echoing Edward Irving, who had declared 'that Christ took our fallen nature, is most manifest, because there was none other in existence to take' (Works 5:15)" (Grotheer, p. 30).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 233, 234.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 266, 267.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 267. See also Jones, *The Consecrated Way to Christian Perfection*. pp. 40, 41.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 435.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 448.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 327.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

³⁹ E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, July 5, 1887.

⁴⁰ A. T. Jones, in *General Conference Bulletin*, 1895, pp. 332, 333.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁴² See Knight, p. 139.

⁴³ A. T. Jones, in *General Conference Bulletin*, 1895, p. 328.

⁴⁴ Ellen G. White confirms Jones's point of view. On the one hand, she said that Christ did not possess "the like passions . . . of our human, fallen natures" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 202, 508); on the other, that "He had all the strength of passion of humanity" (*In Heavenly Places*, p. 155).

⁴⁵ A. T. Jones, in *General Conference Bulletin*, 1895, p. 303.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1893, p. 207.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 1895, p. 329.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

⁴⁹ ———, in *Review and Herald*, Apr. 18, 1899. Quoted in A. T. Jones and E. J. Waggoner, *Lessons on Faith* (Angwin, Calif.: Pacific Union College Press, 1977), pp. 90-92.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Knight, on the jacket of *From 1888 to Apostasy*.

⁵² Ellen G. White letter 57, 1895. Quoted in A. L. White, p. 414.

⁵³ This name is a reference to the message of the third angel of Revelation 14, which contains essentially the message of justification by faith. But this expression very often also refers to the combined message of the three angels of Revelation 14.

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White has best defined the divine and human nature of Christ in these words: "The completeness of His humanity, the perfection of His divinity, form for us a strong ground upon which we may be brought into reconciliation with God" (letter 35, 1894).

⁵⁵ Ellen G. White letter 24, 1892. Quoted in A. L. White, pp. 474, 475.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, in A. L. White, p. 475.

WILLIAM WARREN PRESCOTT (1855-1944)¹

It is important to mention William W. Prescott as one who contributed to the triumph of the message of justification by faith after Minneapolis. During the 1890s he remained close to Waggoner, Jones, and Ellen White. Like them, he made the divine-human nature of Christ the basis of his Christology.

William W. Prescott was born in New England in 1855 of godly parents who were fervent followers of the Millerite movement. William spent his youth in the state of Maine. He graduated from Dartmouth College in 1877, then taught as a professor of Greek and Latin. From 1877 to 1880, he was principal of the secondary school at Northfield, then at Montpelier in Vermont. For a period of time he embarked in journalism before founding his own journal, *The State Republican* of Montpelier.

The year 1885 marked a turning point in his life. First he joined the Adventist movement, then accepted the leadership of Battle Creek College, a post which he held until 1894. While there, his expertise was requested to help with the establishment of Union College in Nebraska, and Walla Walla College in the state of Washington. Prescott also took the initiative to organize the first educational institute for the training of the teaching personnel for the church.

Because of his reputation as an educator and Bible teacher, the leaders of the General Conference asked him in 1894 to go to South Africa, Australia, and Europe, to encourage the development of the educational work, to teach in the various biblical institutes that specialized

in the training of pastors, and to take part in camp meetings. During his stay in Australia he assisted in the creation of Avondale College; and in England he laid the foundation for the educational work.

During the 1901 session Prescott was elected to the vice presidency of the General Conference and the presidency of the publishing house committee; he also became chief editor of the *Review and Herald*. When he left these positions in 1909, he became the editor of *Protestant Magazine*. This provided him an opportunity to devote himself for seven years to the pursuit of intensive research. This monthly journal had the purpose of “protesting against ecclesiastical error and promoting gospel truth.”²

A Fervent Supporter of the 1888 Message

Prescott readily accepted the message of justification by faith as preached by Waggoner in 1888. A 1930 report recalling the names of those who had taken a stand in favor of the message preached at Minneapolis gives Prescott a prominent place.³ However, it also indicates that Prescott was so shocked by the spiritual state that prevailed during certain discussions that he left the session for a while before its closure.⁴

Nevertheless he quickly took a public stand on the side of Waggoner and Jones at the General Conference sessions of 1893 and 1895. There are several declarations in the *General Conference Bulletin* affirming his convictions on the subject of Christ’s human nature. Here is an emphatic one regarding the human nature of Jesus.

“Although Jesus Christ took sinful flesh—flesh in which we sin—He took that flesh, and emptying Himself and receiving the fullness of God Himself, God was able to keep Him from sinning in that sinful flesh. So that although He was manifested in sinful flesh, God by His spirit and power dwelling in Him kept Him from sinning in that sinful flesh.”⁵

However, the most complete and detailed account of Prescott is found in his study on John 1:14, presented during his visit to Australia (1894-1895). He was the featured speaker at various camp meetings organized specifically for his visit. Ellen White, who had then been living in that country since the end of 1891, likewise par-

ticipated in these gatherings. Hence she heard Prescott preach and did not waffle in her appreciation.

The full content of this study was published in the Australian journal *The Bible Echo*.⁶ In this account Prescott declared emphatically that Christ took upon Himself a sinful flesh. In reality, this is the theme of the study. Twenty-five times he affirms that Christ came into the world with the fallen nature of humanity, and twice he specifies that Christ did not come on earth in Adam's nature before the Fall. It is important, then, to summarize here the four main ideas that are clearly enunciated in this important Bible study entitled: "The Word Became Flesh."

1. The Incarnation, a Fundamental Truth

Prescott began his study by marking his preference for the American Revised Version, the translation most faithful to the original text: "the Word became flesh," rather than "the Word was made flesh." He writes: "Through Him all things became; now He Himself became. He who had all glory with the Father now lays aside His glory and becomes flesh. He lays aside His divine mode of existence, and takes the human mode of existence, and God becomes manifest in the flesh. This truth is the very foundation of all truth."

2. Incarnate in "Sinful Flesh"

To prove his point, Prescott referred to Hebrews 2:14: "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same; that through death he might bring to nought him that had the power of death, that is, the devil" (ASV). From this passage Prescott deduced that "Jesus Christ had exactly the same flesh that we bear—flesh of sin, flesh in which we sin, but in which He did not sin, in which He bore our sins." Then Prescott challenged his audience: "Do not set this point aside. No matter how you may have looked at it in the past, look at it now as it is in the word; and the more you look at it in that way, the more reason you will have to thank God that it is so."

Passing on to the case of Adam, Prescott avers that by his sin he lost the image of God, and so did his descendants. That is why "Jesus

Christ came, of flesh, and in the flesh, born of a woman, made under the law; born of the Spirit, but in the flesh. And what flesh could He take but the flesh of the time? Not only that, but it was the very flesh He designed to take; because, you see, the problem was to help man out of the difficulty into which he had fallen. . . . Christ's work must be, not to destroy him [the man], not to create a new race, but to re-create man, to restore in him the image of God."

To accomplish this work of salvation, "Jesus Christ came for that work, and in order to do it, He came, not where man was before he fell, but where man was after he fell. . . . When Christ comes to help man out of the pit, He does not come to the edge of the pit and look over, and say, Come up here, and I will help you back. . . . Jesus Christ comes right down where he is, and meets him there. He takes his flesh and becomes a brother to him."

3. The Flesh of Adam, After the Fall

Throughout his article Prescott repeats untiringly this point he considers fundamental: "He came and took the flesh of sin that this family had brought upon itself by sin, and wrought out salvation for them, condemning sin in the flesh. . . . To redeem man from the place into which he had fallen, Jesus Christ comes, and takes the very flesh now borne by humanity."

Likewise, when Prescott considers the temptation to which Jesus and Adam were subjected, he specifies that "it was in sinful flesh that He was tempted, not the flesh in which Adam fell." It is true, remarked Prescott, that Jesus "had a holiness that enabled Him to come and dwell in sinful flesh, and glorify sinful flesh by His presence in it; and that is what He did, so that when He was raised from the dead, He was glorified. His purpose was that having purified sinful flesh by His indwelling presence, He might now come and purify sinful flesh in us, and glorify sinful flesh in us."

4. Christ in Us, the Hope of Glory

After the theological exposition, Prescott draws the practical applications: "Let us enter into the experience that God has given Jesus Christ to us to dwell in our sinful flesh, to work out in our sinful

flesh what He worked out when He was here. He came and lived here that we might through Him reflect the image of God.”

Prescott goes on to exclaim: “This is the very heart of Christianity. Anything contrary to it is not Christianity.” In support he quotes the apostle John: “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God; and every spirit that confesseth not that Christ is come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:1-3, KJV).

“Now that cannot mean simply to acknowledge that Jesus Christ was here and lived in the flesh. The devils made that acknowledgement. They know that Christ had come in the flesh. The faith that comes by the Spirit of God says, ‘Jesus Christ is come in *my* flesh; I have received Him.’ That is the heart and life of Christianity.”

“The difficulty with the Christianity of today is that Christ does not dwell in the hearts of those professing His name. He is an outsider, one looked at from afar, as an example. But He is more than an example to us. He made known to us what God’s ideal of humanity is, and then He came and lived it out before us, that we might see what it is to be in the image of God. Then He died, and ascended to His Father, sending forth His Spirit, His own representative, to live in us, that the life which He lived in the flesh we may live over again. This is Christianity.”

“It is not enough to talk of Christ and of the beauty of His character. Christianity without Christ dwelling in the heart is not genuine Christianity. He only is a genuine Christian who has Christ dwelling in his heart, and we can live the life of Christ only by having Him dwelling in us. . . . Do not be satisfied with anything else. . . . ‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’ His power, His indwelling presence, that is Christianity.”

Thus Prescott consistently emphasized the difference between a traditional Christianity which is satisfied with a Christ who did not share the flesh and the blood of humanity and who, consequently, could not make them “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4, KJV); and gospel Christianity which affirms, on the contrary, that Christ came in “a flesh of sin” (Rom. 8:3, margin, ARV), that He “has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin” (Heb. 4:15), and He “is able to do immeasurably more than all

we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Eph. 3:20).

Prescott concludes by wishing that the life of Jesus Christ, “the Word” that “became flesh,” might dwell in us each day.

Ellen White Approves Prescott’s Christology

At the beginning of 1895 Jones presented at the General Conference session what he called “the third angel’s message.” This he equated with the message of “justification by faith,” based on the total humanity of Christ and His perfect divinity as the precondition of our reconciliation with God.

Because this was also the conviction of the Adventist community in the United States, the leaders of the organization sent Prescott to preach this message to the churches overseas, in South Africa, in Australia, and in Europe. Thanks to the Australian journal, which published his study entitled “The Word Became Flesh,” and the many testimonies of Ellen White, we know precisely what Prescott taught regarding Christ’s human nature, and to what extent his presentation was appreciated and considered to be an expression of Adventist faith.

At the camp meeting of Armadale, near Melbourne, Australia, Prescott delivered his study on John 1:14. Ellen White was present. She had spoken to the same assembly on Sunday afternoon, October 31, 1895. Thus she knew clearly what she was speaking of in her letters when she expressed her enthusiastic appreciation for the message presented by Prescott.

Here is what we find in one of Ellen White’s manuscripts, written on the morning after Prescott’s presentation. “I have just been listening to a discourse given by Professor Prescott. It was a most powerful appeal to the people. . . . [His] words are spoken in the demonstration of the Spirit, and with power, his face all aglow with the sunshine of heaven. The presence of the Lord is in our meetings day by day.”⁷

In yet another manuscript, we read more specifically how she received the content of Prescott’s message. “The Lord has visited Prescott in a special manner and given him a special message for the

people. . . . The truth flows forth from him in rich currents; people say the Bible is now a new revelation to them.”⁸

In a letter written during the same time span, Ellen White writes, “the Lord has sent Prescott, he is no empty vessel, but full of heavenly treasure. He has presented truths in clear and simple style, rich in nourishment.”⁹ Another letter: “W. W. Prescott has been bearing the burning words of truth such as I have heard from some in 1844; the inspiration of the Holy Spirit is upon him. Prescott has never had such power in preaching the truth.”¹⁰

Other letters could be quoted in which Ellen White repeats the praises both of Prescott himself and the content of his message, delivered “under inspiration of the Holy Spirit.”¹¹ Not satisfied with mentioning him in her private correspondence, Ellen White insisted on making known her appreciation to the whole church in an article sent to the *Review and Herald*, published on January 7, 1896. The following excerpt makes reference specifically to Prescott’s study on the subject: “The Word Became Flesh.”

“In the evening (October 31) Professor Prescott gave a most valuable lesson, precious as gold. The tent was full, and many stood outside. All seemed to be fascinated with the word, as he presented the truth in lines so new to those not of our faith. Truth was separated from error, and made, by the divine Spirit, to shine like precious jewels. . . . The Lord is working in power through His servants who are proclaiming the truth, and He has given Brother Prescott a special message for the people. The power and spirit of the truth come from human lips in demonstration of the Spirit and power of God. The Lord has visited Brother Prescott in a most remarkable manner. We are sure that the Lord has endowed him with His Holy Spirit, and the truth is flowing forth from him in rich currents.”¹²

These testimonies of Ellen White are of great significance in regard to the history of Christology in the Adventist Church. They tend to confirm Prescott’s interpretation of Christ’s human nature. They also establish the context in which the letter addressed to Pastor W.L.H. Baker,¹³ written during the same period of time, must be interpreted. Some Adventist theologians rely on this letter to justify their “new” interpretation, as we will see later in this study.¹⁴

But we must remember what Ellen White wrote on the topic during this period. It is out of the question that she would approve Prescott's interpretation with such fervor if she were in favor of a radically opposite interpretation.

Prescott Confirms His Christology

Throughout the year 1896 Prescott confirmed his convictions about the human nature of Jesus in a series of articles published in the *Review and Herald*.¹⁵ He presented it in a natural way, as the spokesman for the beliefs of the church, and on the basis of the teaching of the Bible.

"The Scripture," he said, "does not leave us in uncertainty as to what kind of flesh and blood this was . . . when God sent His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. . . . The flesh that Jesus Christ took when He came here was the only flesh that anyone could take by being born of a woman, and that was the flesh of sin."¹⁶

To avoid any doubt as to the meaning of Paul's expression "the likeness of sinful flesh," Prescott incorporates a precise statement: "He [Jesus Christ] did not take the likeness of man just as Adam was before he fell, but He came down to the very plane to which man had fallen . . . and took upon Himself the flesh of sin."¹⁷

Like those who before him had approached the problem of Christ's human nature, Prescott made use of Romans 1:3 to affirm that "the Scriptures emphasize the manner of His birth . . . born of the seed of David."¹⁸

Appointed vice president of the General Conference in 1901 and at the same time editor in chief of the *Review and Herald* (1901-1909), Prescott seized the opportunity to repeat the teaching of the church on the human nature of Jesus. He devoted three editorials in particular to this topic. The titles alone reveal the content: "Like to His Brethren," "Christ and His Brethren," and "In a Flesh of Sin."¹⁹

The third article was actually devoted to respond to the questions from his readers. Quite naturally one of them commented on the subject of Romans 8:3 as follows: "I notice that this scripture does not say that God sent His own Son 'in sinful flesh,' but 'in the like-

ness of sinful flesh.’ To me this seems a very different statement.”²⁰ In his reply, Prescott clearly sets out four fundamental truths:

1. Jesus Participated in the Blood and the Flesh of Humanity

First, Prescott refers to Hebrews 2:14-17, which states that Jesus “took part in the blood and the flesh” of the children of human beings. “The natural and legitimate conclusion from this declaration would be that the flesh and blood of Jesus were the same as the children had. This is further emphasized in the same connection: ‘For verily he taketh not hold of angels, but of the seed of Abraham he taketh hold (margin). Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren.’”

Then his first conclusion: “The mission of Jesus was not to rescue fallen angels, but to save fallen man. He therefore identified Himself with man, and not with angels, and He became ‘in all things’ like unto those whom He proposed to help. The flesh of man is sinful. In order to be ‘in all things’ like unto man, it was necessary that Jesus should take sinful flesh.”

2. A Flesh Like Unto That of Sin

Next Prescott quotes Romans 8:3, “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” and raises the question: “What does it mean? Does it mean ‘in sinless flesh’? If so, why did it not say so? Why are the words ‘flesh of sin,’ as it reads in the margin of the American Revised Version, introduced as if it is not the intent to convey the meaning that the flesh of Jesus was the same sinful flesh that we have? It seems to require a forced interpretation in order to attach any other meaning to the statement.”

Prescott explains further, “But we may apprehend the meaning of this passage more clearly if we compare it with another statement in which a similar form of expression is used. Here is one: ‘He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.’ Do we not rightly conclude that Jesus was really a man when we read that He was made ‘in the likeness of men’? Most certainly. The only way in which He could be ‘in the likeness of men’ was to become a man. . . . Is it not equally

clear that the only way in which God could send His Son 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' would be for that Son to have sinful flesh? How would it be possible for Him to be 'in the likeness of sinful flesh,' and yet His flesh be sinless? Such an interpretation would involve a contradiction of terms."

To avoid perplexity Prescott quickly adds that "although Jesus was sent 'in the likeness of sinful flesh,' yet He did not commit sin. 'Him who had no sin He made to be sin on our behalf; that we might become the righteousness of God in him' [2 Cor. 5:21]."

3. Sent to Condemn Sin in the Flesh

Still wanting to clarify the necessity for "sinful flesh," Prescott continues: "In order that the character of God might be manifested in sinful men who should believe on Him, it was necessary that Jesus should unite divinity and humanity in Himself, and that the flesh which He bore should be the same as the other men in whom God was thus to be manifested. Another way of expressing it would be to say that the Son of God tabernacled in the flesh when He appeared in Judea, in order that the way might be prepared for Him to dwell in the flesh of all believers, and that it was therefore necessary that He should take the same kind of flesh as that in which He would afterward dwell when He should take up His abode in the members of His church."

This was not merely a theoretical matter. "If the Son of God did not dwell in sinful flesh when He was born into the world, then the ladder has not been let down from heaven to earth, and the gulf between a holy God and fallen humanity has not been bridged. It would then be necessary that some further means should be provided in order to complete the connection between the Son of God and sinful flesh. And this is exactly what the Roman Catholic Church has done. The creed of that organization is in perfect harmony with the view taken by our correspondent. The formal expression of this doctrine is called the dogma of the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary. . . . We avoid these consequences by denying the doctrine and holding to the plain teaching of the Scriptures."

4. In Order to Be Able to Participate in His Divine Nature

There still remains the second question of the reader to be answered: “How could one in sinful flesh be perfect, be holy?” This is a common question asked by new converts to the Adventist message. It also called forth an answer from Ellen White. “Prescott considered that ‘this question touches the very heart of our Christianity. The teaching of Jesus is ‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.’ And through the apostle Peter comes the instruction, ‘Be ye holy, for I am holy.’”

“No one will deny that we have sinful flesh, and we therefore ask how it will be possible to meet the requirements of the Scripture if it is not possible for one to be perfect or holy in sinful flesh. The very hope of our attaining perfection and holiness is based upon the wonderful truth that the perfection and holiness of divinity were revealed in sinful flesh in the person of Jesus. We are not able to explain how this could be, but our salvation is found in believing the fact. Then may be fulfilled the promise of Jesus: ‘If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.’ It is the crowning glory of our religion that even flesh of sin may become a temple for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.”

“Much more could be said in reply to the question of our correspondent, but we hope that the principles involved and their relation to Christian experience have been made clear, and we trust that none of our readers will accept the doctrine of the papacy because they are unable to explain the mystery of godliness. It is safe to believe the plain teaching of the Scriptures.”

A Truly Christocentric Message

In Prescott’s eyes, the fundamental truth that Christ laid aside His equality with God to become “a simple man,” “like unto men,” “in all things,” “participating in the blood and the flesh” of humanity remains “the central truth of Christianity.” He emphasized this point in opposition to the interpretations of other denominations, because of its newness to many new converts to the Adventist message, and because of its importance in understanding how Jesus was

able "to condemn sin in the flesh," and enable sinners to be set free from "the law of sin and death" by the power "of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2-4).

Prescott's most developed Christology is found in his book *The Doctrine of Christ*, published in 1920 as a textbook for colleges and seminaries.²² As explained in the introduction, this book was not a treatise of systematic theology, but "a revelation of Christ," for the purpose of a practical experience in the life of the believer.²³

Prescott treated the subject very simply in 18 sections, each comprising several lessons. Each lesson is divided in two parts: The first contained Bible references appropriate to the subject; the second included numerous explanatory notes. As a whole, this work is really a Christology in the broadest sense of the term. For our purposes, we shall look only at the most significant statements in the three lessons devoted to the Incarnation.²⁴

For Prescott, Christ was the central truth of Christianity, and the Incarnation constituted "the whole of the Christian gospel," "the truth . . . absolutely essential to the Christian religion," "the mature expression in the fullness of time of the truth that 'God is love.'"²⁵

In fact, "the Word, not only 'came in the flesh' as in 1 John 4:2, but 'became flesh.' These last words imply that the eternal Son entered at His incarnation a mode of existence new to Him, and *became* what He *was not* before; that He not only took upon Him human bodily form, but accepted the limitations of human bodily life as the mode of His own existence while on earth."²⁶

"He who understands the incarnation of the Son of God," wrote Prescott, "has a surer ground of faith, and a richer hope and a straighter access to heaven, than if the ladder of Jacob stood at his bed-head and God's angels were ministering to him."²⁷ For at the time of His incarnation "in some actual and fundamental, though to us inexplicable, way, the divine Saviour so united Himself with the sinful race of man that He bare in His own body, in His own personal experience, not only the weight of its sorrow, but also the weight, though not the guilt, of its sin."²⁸

To avoid any possible doubt about his notion, Prescott specifies again what differentiates the human nature of Jesus from that

of Adam. "Christ assumed, not the original unfallen, but our fallen humanity. In this second experiment, He stood not precisely where Adam before Him had, but with immense odds against Him—evil, with all the prestige of victory and its consequent enthronement in the very constitution of our nature, armed with more terrific power against the possible realization of this divine idea of man—perfect holiness. All this considered, the disadvantages of the situation, the tremendous risks involved, and the fierceness of the opposition encountered, we come to some adequate sense both of the reality and greatness of that vast moral achievement: human nature tempted, tried, miscarried in Adam, lifted up in Christ to the sphere of actualized sinlessness."²⁹

The reason for the Incarnation was the only thing left to be explained. "The problem which, in the assumption of *fallen* human nature, Christ proposed and accepted for Himself, was none other than this, namely, by personally identifying Himself with all its ill fortunes, and sharing the very lameness superinduced by sin, to master, *in* it and *for* it, the infernal power which had wrought all the mischief and woe."³⁰

Thus God has provided for our salvation, concluded Prescott. "He [Christ] was God manifest in the flesh, and came to this earth 'that he might bring us to God.' It is this that makes Christ central and dominant in every life that receives Him, winning trust, redeeming from sin, eliciting devotion, and inspiring hope. It is because He is God manifest, God entering into human life, God meeting human need."³¹

"We have only told half the story of the divine love when we have spoken of the descent of the Son of God from His greatness and majesty to the sorrows and conflicts of this earthly life; and that half of the story is incredible until we make it clear that He came in order to lift up the race to the heights of God."³²

"'He was manifested'—and let us not read into the 'he' anything small or narrow. If we do, we shall at once be driven into the place of having to deny the declaration that He can take away sins. If He was man as I am merely, then though He be perfect and sinless, He cannot take away sins. If into the 'he' we will read all that John ev-

idently meant according to the testimony of his own writing, we shall begin to see something of the stupendous idea, and something of the possibility at least of believing the declaration that 'he was manifested to take away our sins.'"³³

Conclusion

Undoubtedly Prescott's career was unique in many respects, in relationship to the history of the Adventist Church. A brilliant educator, professor of theology, editor, proficient administrator, and vice president of the General Conference, he exerted a decisive influence on the development of the work of education and the clarification of various doctrines. In particular, he contributed to the expansion of the message of justification by faith beyond the frontiers of the United States during his travels in the world.

Like Waggoner and Jones, Prescott did his best to build this message on a Christology that, while fully recognizing the perfect divinity of Christ, placed the accent on Adam's human nature after the Fall—that is to say, a sinful human nature—as a condition of humanity's reconciliation with God. Certainly Prescott's Christology has the merit of being both the most complete and the most explicit.

By his competence and the authority that he enjoyed as vice president of the General Conference, he was evidently empowered as a spokesman for the church. His testimony constitutes an undeniable indication of what Adventists taught and believed regarding Christ's human nature, since the origin of the movement to the end of Prescott's long career in 1944.

References and Notes

¹ See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, pp. 1148, 1149.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1158.

³ See LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, p. 373.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

⁵ William W. Prescott, in *General Conference Bulletin*, 1895, p. 319. At the General Conference session of 1885 Prescott presented six sermons on the topic "The Divine Human Family," structured entirely on the basis of Christ's fallen human nature.

⁶ ———, in *Bible Echo*, Jan. 6 and 13, 1896. See Ralph Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh*, pp. 90-99. All the quotations in the next several pages are from these two articles.

⁷ Ellen G. White manuscript 19, 1895. See Arthur L. White, *Ellen White: The*

Australian Years (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985), pp. 232, 233.

⁸ Ellen G. White manuscript 47, 1895.

⁹ Ellen G. White letter 25, 1895.

¹⁰ Ellen G. White letter 32, 1895.

¹¹ Ellen G. White letter 84, 1895.

¹² E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Jan. 7, 1896. See Ralph Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh*, pp. 88, 89.

¹³ Ellen G. White letter 8, 1895. Quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, pp. 1128, 1129.

¹⁴ See our chapter 10.

¹⁵ W. W. Prescott, in *Review and Herald*, Jan. 28, 1896; Mar. 10, 1896; Mar. 24, 1896; Apr. 7, 1896; Apr. 14, 1896; Apr. 21, 1896.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Mar. 10, 1896.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Apr. 14, 1896.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Nov. 9, 1905; Dec. 7, 1905; Dec. 21, 1905.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, Dec. 21, 1905. All the quotations in the next few pages are from this article.

²¹ See our chapter 3.

²² William W. Prescott, *The Doctrine of Christ* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1920), p. 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-54.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

THE HOLY FLESH MOVEMENT¹

If any doubt remains about the stance of Adventist pioneers on the subject of Christology, their reaction to the “holy flesh movement” should dispel them entirely.

This movement was born in the Indiana Conference churches between 1898 and 1899. Founded by Pastor-evangelist S. S. Davis, this teaching soon carried away the president of the Conference, R. S. Donnell, and several other pastors. Ultimately the entire Indiana Conference committee became favorable to “the holy flesh doctrine,” as its supporters chose to call it.

Contrary to orthodox Adventist Christology, this “strange doctrine” asserted that Christ had taken Adam’s pre-Fall nature and that He therefore possessed “holy flesh.” Based on this premise, it was claimed possible to procure this same “holy flesh” by following Jesus in His experience through the Garden of Gethsemane. In this manner, those who followed the Saviour could reach the corresponding state of physical sinlessness, and obtain a “translation” faith similar to that of Enoch and Elijah.²

Confronted with the development of this belief in the churches of Indiana, the General Conference leaders thought it wise to send brethren S. N. Haskell and A. J. Breed as delegates to the campmeeting held at Muncie, Indiana, from September 13 to 23, 1900. Upon his return to Battle Creek, Haskell felt compelled to inform not only his colleagues in the General Conference but also Ellen White. He sent a letter dated September 25, 1900, to inform her of the situation.

Haskell Informs Ellen White

Haskell³ knew perfectly well the convictions of Ellen White in regard to the human nature of Jesus. He was himself in harmony with her teaching. The purpose of his letter was not to find out whether he or the supporters of the holy flesh doctrine were correct. He simply felt it necessary to keep Ellen White informed.

Here is how Haskell presented the problem to Ellen White: "When *we* stated that we believed that Christ was born in fallen humanity, they would represent *us* as believing that Christ sinned, notwithstanding the fact that *we* would state *our* position so clearly that it would seem as though no one could misunderstand *us*."⁴ As church spokesman, Haskell did not hesitate to include Ellen White, as well as the church, in his position statement.

Previously Haskell had clearly expressed his convictions in various articles. Already, in 1896, Haskell had written in the journal *Signs of the Times* on the subject: "He [Christ] did not come to this world and take upon Himself Adam's condition, but He stepped down lower, to meet man as he is, weakened by sin, polluted in his own iniquity."⁵

In yet another article he wrote: "Christ . . . took not upon Himself the nature of angels, or even man as he was created, but our fallen nature."⁶ "Thus Christ from eternity was made the connecting link between the heaven and the fallen race."⁷ "He brought divinity from the courts of glory into fallen humanity."⁸

Such was Haskell's position when the holy flesh doctrine arose. He explains in his letter to Ellen White: "Their point of theology in this particular respect seems to be this: They believe that *Christ took Adam's nature before he fell*; so He took humanity as it was in the Garden of Eden, and thus humanity was holy, and this was the humanity which Christ had; and now, they say, the particular time has come for us to become holy in that sense, and then we will have 'translation faith' and never die."⁹

Ellen White Replies to Haskell

When Ellen White received Haskell's letter, she had just settled in Elmhaven, in California, upon returning from Australia. So seri-

ously did she judge the situation that she replied immediately. Her letter dated October 10, 1900, establishes a firm and clear stand against the teaching of the holy flesh movement, which she defines as “strange doctrine,” “erroneous theories and methods,” and “a wretched invention of human ideas, prepared by the father of lies.”¹⁰

The contents of Haskell’s letter did not take Ellen White by surprise. She was already aware of what had taken place in Indiana. As she explains later, her departure from Australia was prompted by the teaching of the holy flesh movement. Here is her reply to Haskell:

“Last January the Lord showed me that *erroneous theories and methods* would be brought into our camp meetings, and that the history of the past would be repeated. I felt greatly distressed. I was instructed to say that at these demonstrations demons in the form of men are present, working with all the ingenuity that Satan can employ to make the truth disgusting to sensible people; that the enemy was trying to arrange matters so that the camp meetings, which have been the means of bringing the truth of the third angel’s message before multitudes, should lose their force and influence.”¹¹

Solemnly she adds: “The third angel’s message . . . is to be kept free from every thread of the cheap, miserable inventions of men’s theories, prepared by the father of lies, and disguised as was the brilliant serpent used by Satan as a medium of deceiving our first parents.”¹²

If Haskell’s information had not been in conformity with the truth of the message and Ellen White’s convictions, she would not have hesitated to say so. In this case, not only did she approve Haskell but she also encouraged him to defend the truth.

She wrote again, this time to Brother and Sister Haskell: “By the Lord’s faithful ambassadors the truth must be presented in clear-cut lines. Much of that which today is called testing truth is twaddle which leads to a resistance of the Holy Spirit.”¹³

A Vigorous Protest

Without waiting for the official reaction of the General Conference, pastor S. G. Huntington published a vigorous protest in a small 16-page leaflet entitled *The Sore of Man*. Its aim was to reaffirm the position of the church and to explain how Jesus was able to

live a sinless life even in sinful flesh. "Through His implicit faith in His Father, He was fortified so that His divine nature overwhelmingly triumphed over His sinful nature and hereditary tendencies. Thus from the cradle to Calvary, His days of trial and probation, He lived a pure, holy, and sinless life. Thus He met the demands of a broken law, and became 'the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.'"¹⁴

Then, wishing to explain the advantages for those who believe in Christ and who receive Him as their Saviour, Huntington adds: "Just as God in Christ, 4,000 years this side of Creation, lived a perfect, spotless life in sinful flesh, so through faith in Him, He will cleanse us from all our unrighteousness, impart to us His own righteousness, take up His abode in our hearts, and live the same kind of a life in our sinful flesh six thousand years this side of Creation. Then we can truly say, 'as he is [in character] so are we in this world' (1 John 4:17)."¹⁵

Waggoner Refutes the Holy Flesh Doctrine

Faced with the spread of the holy flesh movement, the General Conference found it necessary to take action. The problem was included in the agenda of the 1901 session. Ellen White was urgently requested to attend. As she pointed out in her presentation, if it had not been for this movement and its erroneous teaching, she would not have responded positively to the invitation. She was then 73 years old. She had just returned from Australia, and traveling through the United States to Battle Creek was not a small matter for someone of her age and fragile health.

Waggoner was also present at the session. As a specialist of the problem, he, along with Ellen White, was asked to refute this "strange doctrine" and to confirm the official belief, as acknowledged by the church, on the subject of the human nature of Christ. He accomplished that in his study of April 16, 1901, devoted entirely to rejecting the affirmation that Christ had come in holy flesh.

Waggoner began his presentation with a question he had been asked: "Was that holy thing which was born of the virgin Mary born

in sinful flesh, and did that flesh have the same evil tendencies to contend with that ours does?"¹⁶

Before replying to the question specifically, Waggoner wanted to help his audience understand the underlying concept so well hidden in the question: the Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception. To his thinking, the concept of "holy flesh" was nothing less than "the deification of the devil."¹⁷ "Really the work of the devil to put a wide gulf between Jesus the Saviour of men, and the men whom He came to save, so that one could not pass over to the other. That is all."¹⁸

"Do you not see," asked Waggoner, "that the idea that the flesh of Jesus was not like ours (because we know ours is sinful) necessarily involves the idea of the immaculate conception of the virgin Mary? Mind you, in Him was no sin, but the mystery of God manifest in the flesh, the marvel of the ages, the wonder of the angels, that thing which even now they desire to understand, and which they can form no just idea of, only as they are taught it by the church, is the perfect manifestation of the life of God in its spotless purity in the midst of sinful flesh. (Congregation: Amen!) O, that is a marvel, is it not?"¹⁹

By doing that, "He [Christ] established the will of God in the flesh, and established the fact that God's will may be done in any human, sinful flesh. But first of all this wonder must be worked out in sinful man, not simply in the person of Jesus Christ, but in Jesus Christ reproduced and multiplied in thousands of His followers. . . . Jesus gives us the experience of the power of Christ in sinful flesh . . . to put under foot, and make subservient to His will, this sinful flesh."²⁰

Generally speaking, "men like to conceal the fault of their ancestors, and if there be a blot anywhere in the family, that does not appear when the family record is written. Jesus Christ was 'born of the seed of David, according to the flesh,' and in the seed of David was Manasseh, who filled Jerusalem with innocent blood from one end to the other. In that line was Judah the adulterer, and the child born of incest, and likewise the harlot Rahab. All of that class who were set forth as the ancestors of Christ show that Jesus was not ashamed to call sinful men His brethren."²¹

From the lesson of Christ's victorious experience in sinful flesh Waggoner concluded: "No matter what our inheritance may have been by nature, the Spirit of God has such power over the flesh that it can utterly reverse all this, and can make us partakers of the divine nature, giving us freedom from the corruption that is in the world through lust; and so God manifests His power through us."²²

Ellen White Rejects the Holy Flesh Doctrine

The following morning, on April 17, 1901, it was Ellen White's turn to condemn the holy flesh movement publicly. Of course, she did not repeat the theological arguments already presented by Waggoner. Her objective consisted rather in exposing the false conclusions derived from the concept of Christ's holy flesh.

Here are some extracts from the message she had prepared for that purpose, under the title "The Late Movement in Indiana." "Instruction has been given me in regard to the late experience of brethren in Indiana and the teaching they have given to the churches. Through this experience and teaching the enemy has been working to lead souls astray."²³

Ellen White did not address the presuppositions regarding the nature of Christ in the holy flesh controversy. Instead, her argument that "the teaching given in regard to what is termed 'holy flesh' is an error"²⁴ was based on two essential points. First, she rejected the claim that sinful human beings may attain holiness of the flesh. Certainly, she writes, "all may now obtain holy hearts, but it is not correct to claim in this life to have holy flesh. . . . To those who have tried so hard to obtain by faith so-called holy flesh, I would say, You cannot obtain it. Not a soul of you has holy flesh now. No human being on the earth has holy flesh. It is an impossibility."²⁵

"If those who speak so freely of perfection in the flesh could see things in the true light, they would recoil with horror from their presumptuous ideas. In showing the fallacy of their assumptions in regard to the holy flesh, the Lord is seeking to prevent men and women from putting on His words a construction which leads to pollution of body, soul, and spirit. . . . And while we cannot claim perfection of the flesh, we may have Christian perfection of the soul.

Through the sacrifice made in our behalf, sins may be perfectly forgiven. Our dependence is not in what man can do; it is in what God can do for man through Christ. . . . Through faith in His blood, all may be made perfect in Christ Jesus.”²⁶

“I have been instructed to say to those in Indiana who are advocating *strange doctrines*, You are giving a *wrong mold* to the precious and important work of God. Keep within the bounds of the Bible. . . . When human beings receive holy flesh, they will not remain on the earth, but will be taken to heaven. While sin is forgiven in this life, its results are not now wholly removed. It is at His coming that Christ is to ‘change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body’ (Phil. 3:21).”²⁷

Second, Ellen White also found fault with the boisterous and fanatical manifestations of the holy flesh advocates. “The manner in which the meetings in Indiana have been carried on, with noise and confusion, does not commend them to thoughtful, intelligent minds. There is nothing in these demonstrations which will convince the world that we have the truth. Mere noise and shouting are no evidence of sanctification, or of the descent of the Holy Spirit. Your wild demonstrations create only disgust in the minds of unbelievers.”²⁸

So Ellen White’s reasons for rejecting the holy flesh movement were both theological and practical. She rejected their bizarre behavior, and she rejected their doctrine that human beings could achieve holy flesh in this life. Although she made no comment on their position about the nature of Christ, she clearly condemned those practices and beliefs that flowed from that premise.

Arthur White explains in the biography of his grandmother: “To meet this fanaticism was one of the reasons she had left Australia and returned to the United States. The situation she was dealing with had been revealed to her in Australia in January 1900, ‘before I left Cooranbong.’”²⁹

The Holy Flesh Doctrine Condemned

Waggoner’s message and Ellen White’s testimony were heeded. As early as the next day the two main leaders of the movement, R. S. Donnell and S. S. Davis, confessed their error in front of the

approximately 300 in attendance. The other delegates, as well as the members of the conference committee of the Indiana churches, followed their president's example. Officially the holy flesh movement seemed to have collapsed. But in reality the doctrine had not disappeared from the churches themselves. Donnell and Davis continued to believe and teach that Christ took Adam's pre-Fall nature. As a result, they were ultimately dismissed from the ministry.

In her address Ellen White offered some advice on how to deal with this type of situation: "Fanaticism, once started and left unchecked, is as hard to quench as a fire which has obtained hold of a building. Those who have entered into and sustained this fanaticism, might far better be engaged in secular labor; for by their inconsistent course of action they are dishonoring the Lord and imperiling the people."³⁰

In 1903 I. J. Hankins, who had succeeded R. S. Donnell as president of the Indiana Conference, wrote to S. S. Davis, the promoter of the holy flesh movement, to enquire of his faith. He asked him eight questions, four of which bore directly on the doctrine of the Incarnation.³¹ For we should not forget that their basic theological argument consisted in saying that "Christ took Adam's nature before the Fall," as clearly shown by Haskell in his letter to Ellen White.

Davis's reply confirms that he had not altered his opinion regarding Christ's human nature. We do not know if the same questions were also put to Donnell. But in 1905 Donnell was readmitted into the ministry, whereas Davis was indefinitely excluded from it. He ultimately left the Adventist Church to join the Baptists, where he was reordained as a minister.

Aside from Davis, it appears that all who were involved in the holy flesh movement ultimately accepted Ellen White's testimony. However auspicious the outcome, the attitude of opposition to this doctrine taken by the General Conference in session is indicative of the official teaching of the church on the subject of the human nature of Jesus at that time.

Conclusion

The holy flesh movement was a first attempt to introduce into

the Adventist Church a doctrine radically opposed to its teachings up to that time. If the pronouncements of Waggoner, Jones, and Prescott, as well as that of others had been erroneous, Ellen White would have corrected them, just as she corrected the “strange doctrine” of the holy flesh.

A testimony written in 1907 leaves no doubt about her position: “During the General Conference of 1901, instruction was given me in regard to the experience of some of our brethren in Indiana, and regarding the doctrines they had been teaching in the churches. I was shown that through this experience and the doctrines taught, the enemy has been working to lead souls astray.”³²

References and Notes

- ¹See Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 31-39.
- ²See Arthur L. White, *Ellen White: The Early Elmshaven Years* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1981), vol. 5, pp. 100-110.
- ³Stephen-Nelson Haskell (1833-1922) was missionary, professor, administrator, and president of several conferences. His written works include *The Story of Daniel the Prophet*, *The Story of the Seer of Patmos*, and *The Cross and Its Shadow*.
- ⁴Stephen-Nelson Haskell to Ellen G. White, Sept. 25, 1900.
- ⁵Stephen-Nelson Haskell, in *Signs of the Times*, Apr. 2, 1896.
- ⁶*Ibid.*, Apr. 9, 1896.
- ⁷*Ibid.*, May 28, 1896.
- ⁸*Ibid.*, Jan. 17, 1900.
- ⁹Stephen-Nelson Haskell to Ellen G. White, Sept. 25, 1900. (Italics supplied.)
- ¹⁰See also E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 37.
- ¹¹Ellen G. White letter 132, 1900 (*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 37). Quoted by A. L. White, p. 103. (Italics supplied.)
- ¹²E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 37.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, p. 38.
- ¹⁴S. G. Huntington, *The Sore of Man*, p. 16. Quoted by William H. Grotheer, *Interpretive History of the Doctrine of Incarnation*, p. 51.
- ¹⁵*Ibid.*
- ¹⁶Ellet J. Waggoner, in *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, p. 403.
- ¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 405.
- ¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 404.
- ¹⁹*Ibid.*
- ²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 406.
- ²¹*Ibid.*, p. 408.
- ²²*Ibid.*
- ²³E. G. White, in *General Conference Bulletin*, 1901, pp. 419-422. We quote from *Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 31, 32.
- ²⁴———, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 32.
- ²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33. (Italics supplied.)

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁹ A. L. White, p. 100.

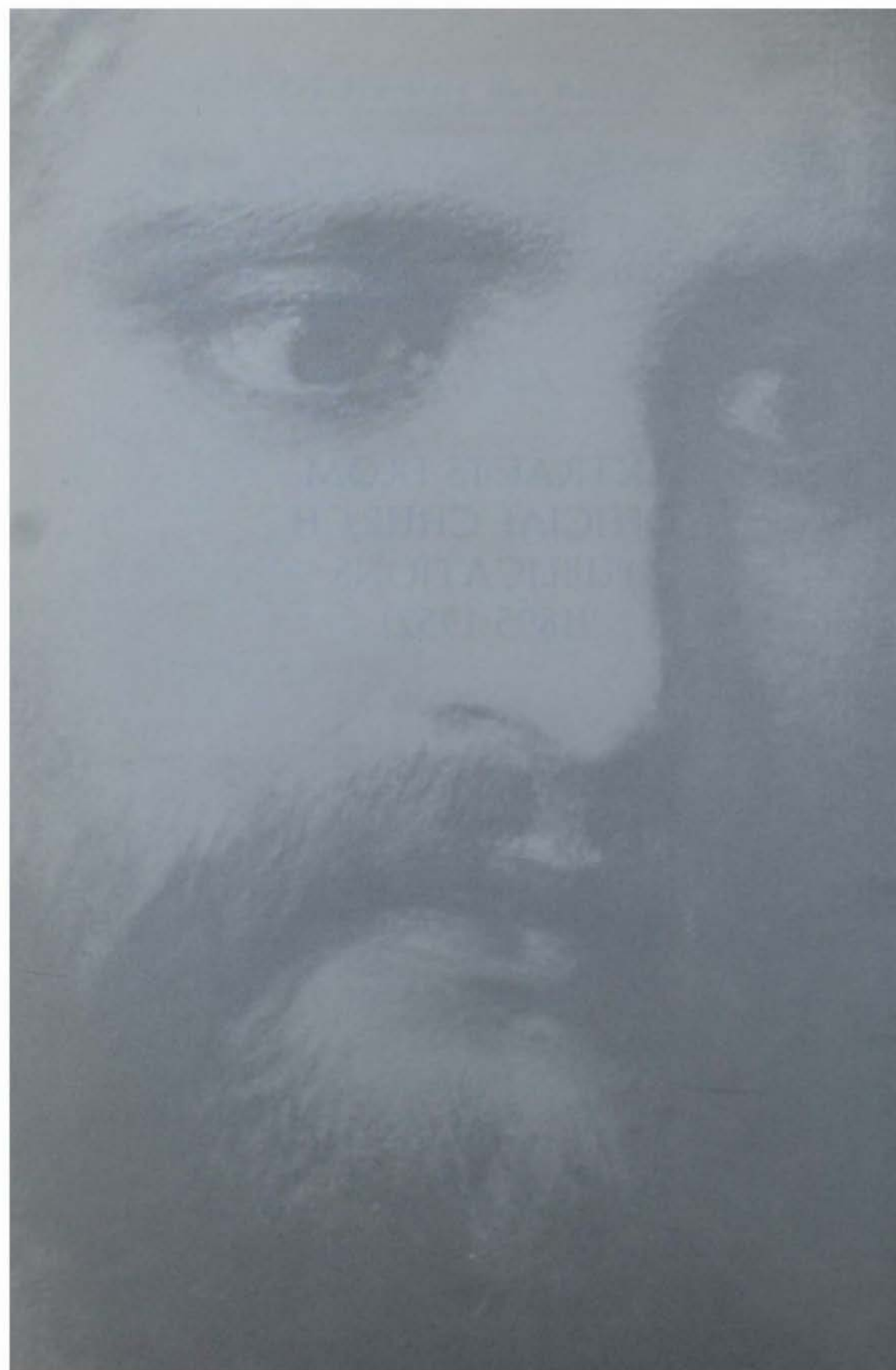
³⁰ E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 35.

³¹ See S. S. Davis to I. J. Hankins, Mar. 15, 1903. Quoted by Grotheer, pp. 54, 55.

³² Ellen G. White manuscript 39, 1907.

Part III

EXTRACTS FROM
OFFICIAL CHURCH
PUBLICATIONS
(1895-1952)



EXTRACTS FROM OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS (1895-1915)

In addition to the pioneers whose writings we have studied, the position of the Adventist Church on Christology is clearly illustrated by the contents of official publications such as journals, quarterly Sabbath School lessons, General Conference bulletins, and a wide variety of books published by denominational publishing houses.

This chapter will deal with statements between 1895 and 1915, beginning at a time when the doctrine of the Incarnation began to be viewed as central to a proper understanding of the plan of salvation, and ending with the year marked by Ellen White's death. In the following chapter we will cover the period from 1916 to 1952, after which a new interpretation surfaced and some writers began to question the traditional position of the Adventist Church on the subject of Christ's human nature.

Extracts From Church Journals

During the years 1895 and 1896 more than 250 statements were made in various journals by church leaders, all clearly affirming that Jesus took upon Himself the human nature of fallen human beings. From 1897 to 1915 more than 200 statements can be found, of which about 100 are from Ellen White, not including an additional 75 or so scattered throughout her letters and manuscripts.¹ However, since we have already discussed Ellen White, Waggoner, Jones, and Prescott, in this chapter we shall ignore statements by these writers.

In 1895 a series of articles from the pen of J. H. Durland

appeared in the *Signs of the Times* that reflected the Christology of Jones as presented at the General Conference session some months previously. "To meet Satan it was necessary to meet Him in the flesh of fallen man," Durland wrote. "So when Jesus took up His abode in the flesh, it was not the flesh man had before he fell, but it was the sinful flesh that man had after he fell. . . . He came to save sinners, therefore He must take the flesh of sinners. . . . He had all the weakness of the flesh that we have. The flesh which He took had the same desires that our own flesh has."²

Some months later, in another article, Durland put the following questions to his readers: "What was the nature of this flesh which He took? Was it free from all tendencies to sin? Was it free from temptations? One scripture answers the latter question . . . (Heb. 4:15). So the flesh which the *Logos* took was subject to temptation, just as the flesh we possess. . . . The flesh without any of the desires for evil is not subject to temptation. But Christ was tempted like as we are, so He must have had the same kind of flesh which we have."³

Not content with asserting that Christ took sinful flesh, Durland also wished to explain the reason for it. "Jesus came in the flesh to meet Satan in his stronghold and drive him forth. . . . To do this He must take the same flesh that man had after the fall. . . . He took neither the nature of angels, nor of man before the fall, but He was born 'under the law,' to redeem them that were under the law. . . . Had He taken the nature of Adam before the fall, He would not have been under the death sentence which was passed upon all men."⁴

Nevertheless, Durland remarked: "He did not possess the passions of our fallen natures, caused by being overcome by sin. But the flesh which He took would soon have possessed all the passions that sin has brought upon us had He once yielded. He met the tempter in the weak sinful flesh, and condemned it so that it was not able to overcome Him. . . . Jesus Christ was sent into the world to condemn sin in the flesh. He took sinful flesh that He might subdue the corruptions of our old nature."⁵

Recall that A. T. Jones had said, "Jesus had the same passions that we have." However, Jones explained, He never surrendered to them. Durland writes that "He did not possess the passions of our

fallen natures,” in that He never gave in to sin. Durland’s view is much closer to that of Jones than might first appear. Jones considered the problem from the point of view of an *inherited* nature, whereas Durland looked at it from the point of view of a *cultivated* nature. Potentially, “Jesus possessed the same passions as we do”; in actuality, “Jesus did not possess the same passions as we do” because He had not succumbed to the power of the sinful human nature which He had inherited from His ancestors.

Likewise, Ellen White constantly made a difference between the *inherited* sinful nature and the *cultivated* sinful nature. On the one hand, she wrote that Jesus “had all the strength of passion of humanity”;⁶ on the other hand, she declared that “He is a brother in our infirmities, but not in possessing like passions”;⁷ “not possessing the passions of our human, fallen natures.”⁸ It may be that she had in mind the difference between *inherited tendencies* to sin, for which we are not guilty, and *cultivated tendencies*, which make sinners of us. For Ellen White as for her Adventist contemporaries, “like every child of Adam He [Christ] accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity,”⁹ but without ever giving in to these tendencies.

Other statements on the topic appear in the Australian journals *Bible Echo* and the *Australasian Signs of the Times*. G. C. Tenney, who was in charge of the journal *Bible Echo*, stated in an editorial: “Very few of us realize how nearly the divine nature approached the human in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. More properly speaking, it is impossible for us even to conceive of the infinite condescension that was necessary in order that the Son of God, the associate of the Father, should appear in mortal flesh and participate in human experiences, with all their trials and weaknesses. How fully this was accomplished was expressed by the apostle in Hebrews 2:17: ‘Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren’ (KJV).”

“In this way only could He be brought to feel the power of temptations. We cannot suppose that the temptations to which humanity is subject would impress the Godhead. But ‘He was tempted in all points like as we are:’ *consequently He must have partaken of our nature.* . . . There is but little sympathy in the thought of Jesus hav-

ing met our temptations in His divine capacity and nature. They would be but a thistledown wafted against a mountain. In this sense 'God cannot be tempted.'"

"But when we consider our Saviour . . . *struggling with innate weakness*; and when we fully look upon our own faulty and often unsuccessful career, we wonder, how did He endure 'such contradiction of sinners against Himself'?"¹⁰

Many similar declarations could be quoted, as indicated by Ralph Larson's *The Word Was Made Flesh*, in which the author has indexed in chronological order many statements dealing with Adventist Christology.¹¹

Extracts From the Sabbath School Lessons

In 1889 the quarterly pamphlet of the Sabbath school lessons first appeared. The lessons were prepared to provide for daily Bible study and as a topic for discussion on Sabbath morning in conjunction with the worship service.

The introduction states, "*The Adult Sabbath School Lessons* are prepared by the Sabbath School Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the lessons is directed by a worldwide Sabbath School Lesson committee, the members of which serve as consulting editors." The role of this committee was to ensure that the explanatory notes in each lesson were in harmony with the church's official teaching.

During the period from 1895 to 1915 many statements are found in the Sabbath school lessons that leave little doubt on the subject of Adventist belief regarding Christ's human nature. An example is the following explanation in one of the lessons of the second quarter of 1896: "In order to meet man where he was after the fall, Christ emptied Himself of all His glory and power, becoming just as dependent on the Father for life and daily strength as sinful man is dependent upon Him."¹²

In 1909 one second quarter lesson dealt with John 1:1-18. Here is the commentary on verse 14: "Divinity tabernacled in the flesh of humanity. Not the flesh of sinless man, but such flesh as the children of earth possess. That was the glory of it. The divine seed could

manifest the glory of God in sinful flesh, even to absolute and perfect victory over any tendency of the flesh.”¹³

In this lesson, the same explanation occurs again: “Jesus was God acting in sinful flesh on behalf of the sinner. He made Himself one with humanity. He took upon Himself the woes, the needs, and sins of humanity, so that He felt the consciousness and keenness of it as no other soul ever felt it.”¹⁴

Among the topics of the first quarter of 1913 was a study on the relation between the incarnation and the priesthood of Jesus Christ. This statement is found in the first note: “It is very important that we should have a clear understanding of the relation of the incarnation of Christ to His mediatorial work. He was made priest ‘after the power of an endless life,’ in order that He might minister grace, mercy, and power to the weak and erring. This is accomplished by making such a close union with those needing help, that divinity and humanity are brought into personal relation, and the very Spirit and life of God dwell in the flesh of the believer. In order to establish this relation between God and sinful flesh, it was necessary for the Son of God to take sinful flesh; and thus was bridged the gulf which separated sinful man from God.”¹⁵

Note 3 of the same lesson ends with these words: “By assuming sinful flesh, and voluntarily making Himself dependent upon His Father to keep Him from sin while He was in the world, Jesus not only set the example for all Christians, but also made it possible for Him to minister to sinful flesh the gift of His own Spirit and the power for obedience to the will of God.”¹⁶

This view of the Incarnation was also contrasted to the Catholic doctrine of the immaculate conception, which was, to Adventist thinking, a negation of the incarnation of Christ. “This denial of the perfect union of Christ with sinful flesh opens the way for a series of subsidiary mediators whose duty it is to bring the sinner into saving touch with Christ.”¹⁷

The lessons for the second quarter of 1913 were devoted to the sanctuary and the mediation of Christ. In one of the lessons Catholic teaching was discussed: “What is the teaching of modern Babylon concerning this same fundamental doctrine? By the dogma of the

immaculate conception of the virgin Mary, Rome teaches that the mother of Jesus was preserved from the stain of original sin, and that she had sinless flesh. Consequently she was separated from the rest of humanity. As a result of this separation of Jesus from sinful flesh, the Roman priesthood has been instituted in order that there may be someone to mediate between Christ and the sinner.”¹⁸

Then, replying to a quotation from a Catholic source that called the belief that Christ had taken sinful flesh “revolting,” the note concludes: “Thus by shutting Christ away from the same flesh and blood which we have . . . modern Babylon really denies the vital truth of Christianity, although pretending to teach it. Such is ‘the mystery of iniquity.’”¹⁹

The fourth quarter in 1913 was devoted to the study of the Epistle to the Romans. In the first lesson there is a question about Christ “born of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3, KJV). Note 5 comments: “Christ was, therefore, of the royal line through His mother. But He was more than this; He was the same flesh as the seed of David, in and through which for generations had flowed the blood of sinful humanity—Solomon, and Rehoboam, and Ahaz, and Manasseh, and Amon, and Jeconiah, and others. The Son of God took this same flesh in order that He might meet temptation for us, and overcome with divine power every trial we must meet. Christ is our Brother in the flesh, our Saviour from sin.”²⁰

The Epistle to the Romans was again the subject of study during the first quarter of 1914. Here is the commentary given on Romans 8:3, 4: “What the law in sinful man could not do, God did by sending His own Son. That Son took the flesh of sinful man, and overcame where man failed, overthrew sin in the flesh; and so He can come into the flesh of those who will open their hearts to receive Him, with that same power, and conquer sin there.”

These extracts from Sabbath school quarterlies are in harmony with all that was taught by Adventist writers who had expressed themselves on Christ’s human nature through the years.

Extracts From Several Books

Just as with the *Sabbath School Lessons*, no book is ever printed by

officially owned publishing houses of the church without a prior review of the manuscript by a designated reading committee. This ensures the contents of the book to be in harmony with official teaching. It is not our purpose here to repeat the works of Waggoner, Jones, Prescott, or Ellen White, which have been dealt with in preceding chapters. It will suffice to mention the most representative works.

1. *Looking Unto Jesus*, by Uriah Smith

Uriah Smith was not only the editor of the *Review and Herald* for 35 years and author of many books on prophecy, but also the second in command at the General Conference for 21 years in his position of secretary. Here are two extracts from his book *Looking Unto Jesus*, published in 1897.

“In the likeness of sinful flesh . . . He reached down to the very depths of man’s fallen condition, and became obedient unto death, even the ignominious death of the cross.”²²

“He [Jesus] came in the likeness of sinful flesh to demonstrate before all parties in the controversy that it was possible for men in the flesh to keep the law. He demonstrated this by keeping it Himself. On our plane of existence, and in our nature, He rendered such obedience to every principle and precept, that the eye of Omniscience itself could detect no flaw therein. His whole life was but a transcript of that law, in its spiritual nature, and in its holy, just and good demands. He thus condemned sin in the flesh and doing no sin, showing that it was possible for man thus to live.”²³

2. *Questions and Answers*, by Milton C. Wilcox

At first Milton C. Wilcox was assistant editor of the *Review and Herald*, in association with Uriah Smith. Later he became the first editor of *Present Truth* in England, then of *Signs of the Times* for a quarter of a century at the Pacific Press in California. In 1911 he published *Questions and Answers*, a compilation of replies given by the editor to questions from readers, while he was in charge of *Signs of the Times*.

Here is a typical extract, an answer given to a question posed by

a reader on the subject of the verses in Hebrews 2:14-17, KJV, declaring that Jesus was “made like unto his brethren.” “The eternal Logos ‘became flesh,’ the same as we; for He was ‘born of a woman, born under the law,’ under its condemnation, as a human, having the flesh with all the human tendencies; a partaker of the ‘flesh and blood’ of humanity; ‘in all things’ ‘made like unto His brethren,’ ‘suffered being tempted.’ And He met all the temptations even as you and I must meet them, by faith in the will and Word of God. There is not a tendency in the flesh of humanity but what dwelt in Him. And He overcame them all.”²⁴

3. Bible Readings for the Home Circle

In 1915 the Review and Herald Publishing Association published a book of Bible studies entitled *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*.²⁵ By the time of the second edition in 1936 more than 1.25 million copies had been distributed in the world. A third edition appeared in 1946.²⁶

For about a half century this book constituted the basis for the biblical teaching of the church. Most Adventists used it to increase their knowledge of church doctrine and to help share the message with others. No other denominational publication was branded with a more official seal of approval than this book. The Bible readings were “contributed by a large number of Bible students.” The introduction to the 1946 edition states that “the work has recently been thoroughly revised and rewritten, much enlarged . . . by a large committee of able critics and Bible students.”²⁷

One could hardly find a more representative document of church teaching. The lessons are presented in the form of questions and answers, with occasional explanatory notes. The doctrine of the Incarnation, entitled “A Sinless Life,” is here reproduced in its entirety:²⁸

- 1. What testimony is borne concerning Christ’s life on earth?** “*Who did no sin* neither was guile found in his mouth.”
1 Peter 2:22.
- 2. What is true of all other members of the human fam-**

ily? "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Romans 3:23.

3. **With what question did Jesus challenge His enemies?**

"Which of you convinceth me of sin?" John 8:46.

4. **To what extent was Christ tempted?** "[He] was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Hebrews 4:15.

5. **In His humanity, of what nature did Christ partake?**

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, *he also himself likewise took part of the same*, that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." Hebrews 2:14.

6. **How fully did Christ share our common humanity?**

"Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." Verse 17.

NOTE: In His humanity Christ partook of our sinful, fallen nature. If not, then He was not "made like unto his brethren," was not "in all points tempted like as we are," did not overcome as we have to overcome, and is not, therefore, the complete and perfect Saviour that man needs and must have to be saved. The idea that Christ was born of an immaculate or sinless mother, inherited no tendencies to sin, and for this reason did not sin, removes Him from the realm of a fallen world, and from the very place where help is needed. On His human side, Christ inherited just what every child of Adam inherits—a sinful nature. On the divine side, from His very conception He was begotten and born of the Spirit. And all this was done to place mankind on vantage-ground, and to demonstrate that *in the same way* everyone who is "born of the Spirit" may gain like victories over sin in his own sinful flesh. Thus each one is to overcome *as Christ overcame*. Rev. 3:21. Without this birth there can be no victory over temptation, and no salvation from sin. John 3:3-7.

7. **Where did God, in Christ, condemn sin, and gain the**

victory for us over temptation and sin? “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, *condemned sin in the flesh.*” Romans 8:3.

NOTE: God, in Christ, condemned sin, not by pronouncing against it merely as a judge sitting on the judgment-seat, but by coming and living *in the flesh, in the likeness of sinful flesh*, and yet without sinning. In Christ, He demonstrated that it is possible, by His grace and power, to resist temptation, overcome sin, and *live a sinless life in the flesh.*

8. **By whose power did Christ live the perfect life?** “I can of mine own self do nothing.” John 5:30. “The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.” John 14:10.

NOTE: In His humanity Christ was as dependent upon divine power to do the works of God as is any man to do the same thing. He employed no means to live a holy life that are not available to every human being. Through Him, everyone may have God dwelling in him and working in him “to will and to do of his good pleasure.” 1 John 4:15; Philippians 2:13.

9. **What unselfish purpose did Jesus ever have before Him?** “For I came down from heaven, *not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.*” John 6:38.

This lesson deals only briefly with the various aspects of Adventist Christology. Nevertheless, question 6 was obviously considered to be of prime importance, so much so that it mandated an explanatory note. These notes were in harmony with Adventist Christology as it had been taught consistently by the pioneers of the message, since the origin of the movement all the way to the time of the third edition of this work in 1946.

As we shall see, it is precisely on the basis of these explanatory notes in 6, 7, and 8 that a number of evangelical theologians have condemned Adventists for not being authentic Christians, because they attributed a sinful human nature to Jesus. But they were correct

in considering that the statements made in this lesson were truly representative of the church.

References and Notes

- ¹ See Ralph Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh*, pp. 67, 111.
- ² J. H. Durland, in *Signs of the Times*, Sept. 12, 1895.
- ³ *Ibid.*, Sept. 26, 1895.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, Oct. 10, 1895.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁶ Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 155.
- ⁷ ———, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 202.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 509.
- ⁹ ———, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.
- ¹⁰ G. C. Tenney, in *Bible Echo*, May 15, 1889. (Italics supplied.)
- ¹¹ See Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh*, pp. 34-154.
- ¹² *Adult Sabbath School Lessons*, second quarter 1896, p. 11. All Sabbath school lesson quotations in this chapter are quoted by William H. Grotheer, *Interpretive History of SDA Doctrine of Incarnation*, pp. 38-41.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, second quarter 1909, p. 8.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, first quarter 1913, p. 14.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, second quarter 1913, p. 25.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, fourth quarter 1913, p. 6.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, first quarter, 1914, p. 16.
- ²² Uriah Smith, *Looking Unto Jesus*, p. 23.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- ²⁴ Milton C. Wilcox, *Questions and Answers* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), vol. 1, pp. 19, 20.
- ²⁵ The first edition of *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* dates back to the 1880s. Until 1915 the various editions were without any notes.
- ²⁶ *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*, 3rd ed. (1936), p. 11.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 115, 116. (All Bible texts in this quotation are from the King James Version.)

EXTRACTS FROM OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS (1916-1952)

The year 1915 does not mark any change of interpretation in the Adventist doctrine of the Incarnation. However, it does mark the death of Ellen White. With her passing, the last survivor of the 1844 group of pioneers had disappeared.

Ellen White repeated a vibrant warning near the end of her life: “We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and *His teaching in our past history.*”¹

All of the extant documents for the period of 1916 to 1952 bear uniform witness to the position always taught in the church about the human nature of Jesus, namely, that Jesus took upon Himself Adam’s nature after the Fall—in other words, fallen nature—but without ever committing any sin.

Extracts From Church Periodicals

An index of some 200 statements from the church’s official periodicals shows no variation from this traditional position. Pastors, professors, editors, administrators, General Conference executives, including several presidents, all speak with one voice.

On September 6, 1917, Joseph E. Steed wrote in the *Review and Herald*: “It was necessary that Christ should have an experience as a man, in order that He might succor man in his temptations, and also act as man’s intercessor. . . . It has already been shown that this Saviour became a man subject to all the ills of the flesh, being born

into sinful flesh; and while in that flesh, He suffered as other men suffer in His conflict with sin.”²

The testimony of R. S. Owen is also interesting: “Christ’s work in the flesh was the condemning of sin in the flesh. Sin dwells in our sinful flesh, and Christ condemned it by dwelling in the very house of sin, *but never yielding to its unlawful clamors, never responding to its evil invitations*. He demonstrated that a man may obtain help from God, which will enable him to live in the flesh, and yet live for God.”³

In the same month, J. A. Rippey wrote in the Australian periodical *Signs of the Times*: “Nothing then, could be clearer than that the same kind of flesh that David had was the kind that Jesus had. Who was David? He was the son of Jesse. But who was Jesse? He was the son of Ruth. Ruth was a Moabitish girl, a descendant of Moab; and Moab was a son of one of Lot’s daughters. Gen. 19:36, 37. We find as we study the character of the progenitors of Jesus that they are the darkest of any upon the earth, and have gone to the greatest depths in sin.

“When Jesus was born into the world, He took upon Himself sinful flesh after it had been weakened by nearly four thousand years of wickedness. He might have come through another line, but He came through the weakest of the weak that He might prove to the world that man never plunged so deep into sin but that the power of God is sufficient to enable him to live a victorious life. He ‘was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin’ Heb. 4:15. He was not only tempted, but His temptations were so strong that He even suffered when He was tempted. Chapter 2:18. Although Jesus had in His flesh all the desires that were in the flesh of His ancestors, yet He never once yielded to sin.”⁴

On March 22, 1927, L. A. Wilcox published in *Signs of the Times*, an article that addresses the question: “Is there hope of overcoming our hereditary tendencies toward evil?” Wilcox replies, first by having recourse to the genealogy of Jesus: “And I am glad for that [Christ’s genealogy]. For it helps me to understand how He can be ‘touched with the feeling’ of all my infirmities. He came where I was. He stood in my place. In His veins was the incubus of a tainted heredity like a caged lion ever seeking to break forth and destroy.

For four thousand years the race had been deteriorating in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth; and Christ took upon Him the infirmities of humanity at its worst. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of degradation.”⁵

Then Wilcox quotes in support of his declaration a passage from Ellen White taken from the book *Desire of Ages*: “If we have in any sense a more trying conflict than had Christ, then He would not be able to succor us. But our Saviour took humanity, with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man, with the possibility of yielding to temptation. We have nothing to bear which He has not endured.”⁶

“It is good to know that,” Wilcox remarks. “He, the Son of God, became the Son of man, that I, a son of man, might become a son of God. He became as I am that I might become as He is. He partook of my human nature that I might partake of His divine nature. In every temptation that assails, it is strength to know that just such a temptation in all its overwhelming force attacked Him—attacked Him where, by heredity, He was weakest—attacked Him in unexpected times and ways; and that, with equal tendencies toward evil, in spite of bad blood and inherited meanness, by the same power to which I have access, He conquered. He won for me. He offers me His victory for my own—a free gift. And so in all these things I am more than conqueror through Him that loved me.”⁷

Later F. M. Wilcox, editor of the *Review and Herald* (1911-1944), also cofounder of the Ellen G. White Estate and member of the original board of trustees, explained why he felt it was important to identify Christ’s flesh with that of fallen humanity. “The ground of our assurance in coming to the Lord Jesus is the fact that He took upon Himself the nature of man, and in this human form conquered Satan, thus bridging the gulf which sin had made between God and humanity. Going through this experience in behalf of the lost race, He became a perfect Saviour. . . . He became identified with man in all His trials and temptations. . . . Christ was sorely and severely tempted, tempted as no other human being has ever been tempted, yet He endured all this without sin. Not once did He yield to the tempter’s power. In every conflict He was victorious. With a mind stayed upon God, trusting in the love and power of His heavenly Father, He re-

sisted at every turn the attacks of the enemy. This, the heritage of victory over sin, He likewise bequeaths to us in addition to the sympathy which He affords us in times of trial. As He took hold of divine power, it is our privilege to do the same. The resources which were open to His demand, are also open to our demand.”⁸

This teaching was not restricted to the editors of various periodicals of the denomination. It was also that of the highest authorities of the church such as division presidents, vice presidents, and presidents of the General Conference. It was indeed the most authentic expression of the faith found in the Adventist community on the question of Christology. Without having to quote each one individually, we wish to make reference to a few testimonies of the most representative authors.

Throughout this period W. W. Prescott was certainly the most prolific and most competent. Then as general secretary and vice president of the General Conference from 1915 to 1937, he continued to promulgate the teaching of the denomination in his numerous articles. His interpretation has already been fully presented, so it will not be repeated here. Later W. H. Branson, who was to be General Conference president from 1950 to 1954, proclaimed the same convictions in articles published in different periodicals.⁹

Several times he wrote: “In order for Christ to understand the weakness of sinful nature He had to experience it. . . . Therefore He became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. . . . God must first come down to man in order to lift man up to Himself.”¹⁰ “It was not the nature of angels that He assumed, but that of Abraham. He was made ‘like unto His brethren.’”¹¹ “Oh, the shame of it, that the great God should design to come to dwell with men, tabernacling in their own flesh.”¹²

Two presidents of the Southern European Division, whose headquarters were in Bern, Switzerland, did their best to spread in Europe the Christology taught in the United States. A. V. Olson¹³ was first to express himself on the subject of the fallen human nature that Christ took upon Himself: “Jesus inherited . . . the nature of His mother,” he wrote. “A man named Jesus, made of flesh and blood like other men, had actually lived in their midst.”¹⁴ “Thus in this

sense the second Adam was not physically identical with the first Adam. It was also in this sense of depreciation in size and vitality that Christ by the law of heredity is said to have taken upon Himself our 'fallen nature' (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 112), 'our nature in its deteriorated condition' (*Signs of the Times*, June 9, 1898)."¹⁵

M. V. Campbell likewise was president of the Southern European Division (1954-1958), and later became vice president of the General Conference. Here is how he expressed himself at a time when some were beginning to formulate a new interpretation regarding the nature of Jesus: "In coming to our world the Saviour did not descend out of the sky like an angel or a being from another world. He took His place as a member of the human race by birth into a family whose ancestry was known. He was born as helpless as any other babe. . . . Jesus did not come into the world as did the first Adam, who left the Creator's hands with no bent toward sinning, but rather He came 'in the likeness of sinful flesh' (Rom. 8:3, KJV). His divinity did not diminish His humanity. It filled it, overflowed it, and surrounded it, but in no way destroyed it. The Saviour was influenced toward sin through heredity, environment, and the strongest temptations of the devil. . . . In overcoming sin, Jesus did not use any spiritual power which was His by virtue of being the Son of God. He used only the weapons which are in the hands of even His humblest followers."¹⁶

Extracts From Adventist European Literature

The testimonies of these two Southern European Division presidents—both Americans—are representative of the teaching at that time in the English-speaking Adventist churches of the world. But what was the general belief on the subject in continental Europe where the message had been officially introduced in 1874?¹⁷

As we know, the journal *Signes des Temps* (*Signs of the Times*) was founded by John N. Andrews in the city of Basel in 1876. It is interesting to note that no mention is ever made of the fallen human nature of Christ until 1938. Evidently this aspect of Christology did not constitute at the time an important feature of Adventist teaching.¹⁸ It could be that Adventists on the continent shared the view

of most Protestants on this issue. Support for this comes from the chief editor of *Signes des Temps*: "To save mankind, it was necessary, according to God's justice, that Christ should be placed under the same conditions as Adam at the creation, that is to say, free from sin, but susceptible of falling into temptation."¹⁹

Thus, traditional Adventist Christology as taught in the English-speaking world was not completely obscured, but its introduction was delayed on the European continent until the English translations of Ellen White's books and articles became available.

The first mention of traditional Christology is found in the *Revue Adventiste*, the information bulletin of the Seventh-day Adventist churches for Latin Europe. The article is dated November 15, 1923. It was written by Tell Nussbaum, former president of the French Conference.²⁰ Titled: "Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man," it summarizes the teaching of the Adventist Church on the subject of the person and work of Christ. Here is an extract:

"Jesus was declared with power to be the Son of God through the spirit of holiness, by His resurrection from the dead. Rom. 1:4. Having come in our flesh of weakness, born under the law, capable of sinning, He did not commit any sin. It was there that sin was seen to be conquered, and that man, in his fallen nature, was put back into a state where holiness was made possible. He could live the life of God which is found only in Jesus Christ, and which He grants to us continually by faith.

"For the purpose intended by Jesus Christ was fulfilled: to transmit His perfect nature to His posterity. But this will not be completely achieved until the day when we see Him as He is now in heaven (John 17:22). Today, accepting by faith what Christ has done for us, we walk by the spirit of Jesus Christ. . . . The Spirit of life, who is in Jesus Christ, has freed us from sin. By His death, He has triumphed over sin, in order to give us this power."²¹

It is doubtful this statement truly represents what most Adventists of continental Europe believed. The aim of the author was apparently to make known more widely the accepted teaching of the Adventist Church. Another series of articles with the same intent appeared in the *Revue Adventiste* between 1925 and January 1926.²²

These were later reprinted in the form of a pamphlet with this meaningful title: *A Touchstone: Jesus Christ Come in the Flesh*.²³

Its author was Jules-Cesar Guenin, then president of the French Conference. He had a perfect knowledge of the teaching of Christology as established by Ellen White and the pioneers, to which he makes references. To introduce the subject, he relies on the verses in 1 John 4:1-3, claiming that "every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus has come in the flesh" is of God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus has come in the flesh is of antichrist.

But, Guenin asks, "what does the Bible mean when it speaks of 'Jesus come in the flesh'?" After considering the main passages dealing with the Incarnation (Phil. 2:5-8; John 1:14; Rom. 8:3; Heb. 2:14-18; 4:15), he concludes: "This doctrine is of such importance that it is, as it were, the doctrine of doctrines, the high point of apostolic and evangelistic preaching, the touchstone of authentic Christianity."²⁴

Addressing the problem of Christ's human nature, Guenin sides with his American colleagues: "The redemption of humanity could be achieved only by a God becoming man. It was clothed in flesh like ours that Christ encountered moral struggles, ran the same risks as we do, in order to prove that the righteousness of the law could be attained by man. The Son of God came into this world with flesh like unto our sinful flesh. . . . In this way sin was gloriously overcome, finally condemned, and holiness had been realized in human flesh."²⁵

In speaking of the temptations to which Jesus had been subjected, Guenin referred to several declarations of Ellen White, such as the following: "If we have in any sense a more trying conflict than had Christ, then He would not be able to succor us. But our Saviour took humanity, with all its liabilities. He took the nature of man, with the possibility of yielding to temptation. We have nothing to bear which He has not endured."²⁶

Furthermore, J. C. Guenin also quoted Protestant theologian E. de Pressense on the subject of the temptations Jesus faced in the wilderness: "The Redeemer passed through this great test of freedom without which no moral destiny is achieved. It is here that we must accept the complete mystery of His humiliation. If we attribute sinlessness to Him, we separate Him from the actual conditions of an

earthly existence; His humanity is then nothing more than an illusion, a transparent veil through which is seen His unconcerned divinity. Not being like us, He is no longer with us. To the stirring drama of the moral struggle follows an indescribable metaphysical phantasmagoria. We must no longer speak of temptations or trials on this subject.”²⁷

From the victory of Jesus over sin, Guenin draws the following practical lesson: “Christ conquered sin to prove that each believer can himself also conquer sin; but He conquered because He wanted to do so, and for that He had to struggle, to suffer, using only the weapons of faith and prayer. It is by these same means, with these weapons that the believer can conquer. . . . This is what it means: to confess Christ come in the flesh.”²⁸

This doctrine of the Incarnation constitutes for J. C. Guenin “the vital point of the regenerative and redemptive religion of Jesus; to deny this is at the same time to cause Christianity to lose all its efficacy and its practical value.”²⁹

In an article about the two Adams, published in the *Revue Adventiste* in 1942, J. C. Guenin reemphasizes the importance of Jesus to have participated in our complete humanity. “If Jesus had come with the impossibility of sinning, as certain believers and a certain theology regard it, how could He have become the Father of a new humanity, victorious, a ‘great high priest’ who could sympathize with the weaknesses of mankind, and a proof of the possibility of living a victorious life? Jesus did not come into the world only to take away sin, to atone for the guilt of sinners, but He also came to give mankind the example of a perfect obedience to the divine will, to prove that such obedience is possible to the one who sincerely desires it. To do that it was necessary that Christ lived an absolutely holy life, without sin.”³⁰

Wishing to explain the doctrine of the Incarnation to non-Adventist readers, J. C. Guenin published a series of three articles in *Signes des Temps*.³¹ It was the first mention of Adventist Christology in this magazine after 62 years of publication. The contents of these articles is clearly suggested by their titles; “Jesus Christ Come in the Flesh”; “Jesus Christ, Ideal of Humanity”; “Was Jesus a Sinner?” In

them we find repeated the teaching developed in the brochure *A Touchstone: Jesus Come in the Flesh*.

Other authors made similar references to this belief common to Adventists of that time. In an article by James Howard, translated from English and published in the *Revue Adventiste*, we find the following on the subject of the temptation of Christ: "The hereditary tendency to sin is certainly strong. The mother of Jesus Christ inherited 'the form and the resemblance' of her ancestors; she had been born in sinful flesh; and that being so, her Son Jesus Christ inherited human nature."³²

Likewise, in the report of a sermon given in Geneva on July 11, 1928, on "the price of our redemption," B. E. Beddoe, a transient visitor, spoke of the human nature of Jesus who, being like us, "knew the tendencies of the flesh, desires which lead to sin." And to the question: "Could He sin?" the preacher replied without hesitation: "Certainly."³³

Lastly, it is appropriate to repeat what Charles Gerber³⁴ wrote in his evangelistic tracts, distributed by the thousands, later compiled and rearranged as a book entitled *Le Chemin du Salut (The Path to Salvation)*.³⁵ In the section dealing with the "mystery of the Incarnation," he confirms the accepted Adventist Christology. "To save mankind, God gave His Son who assumed our nature and was identified with us. The Son of God consented to become the Son of man. 'God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law' (Gal. 4:4, ASV). 'The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us' (John 1:14). 'God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man' (Rom. 8:3)."

"It is a miracle, it is a mystery, it is God coming down among us and becoming man, it is heaven humbling itself to earth, it is Jacob's ladder binding earth to heaven and heaven to earth. . . . Jesus was made man. . . . He suffered hunger, thirst, and fatigue as we do. He was 'in all things . . . like unto his brethren,' He had to face similar temptations; He shed tears, and finally He died."³⁶

Extracts From the Sabbath School Lessons

As already stated, the Sabbath school lessons are the best official

indicator of Adventist Church teaching. Prepared by specialists and verified by a worldwide committee, they are indeed the most authentic expression of the Adventist faith. Every time the lessons touch on the human nature of Jesus, the explanatory notes invariably present the traditional teaching. Examples for the period from 1916 to 1952 are so few that it is possible to quote them all. The first one dates from the first quarter of 1921, and is relevant to a question on the Incarnation.

“Christ assumed, not the original unfallen, but our fallen humanity. In this second experiment, He stood not precisely where Adam before Him had, but, as has already been said, with immense odds against Him—evil, with all the prestige of victory and its consequent enthronement in the very constitution of our nature, armed with more terrific power against the possible realization of this divine ideal of man—perfect holiness. All this considered, the disadvantages of the situation, the tremendous risks involved, and the fierceness of the opposition encountered, we come to some adequate sense both of the reality and greatness of that vast moral achievement; human nature tempted, tried, miscarried in Adam, lifted up in Christ to the sphere of actualized sinlessness.”³⁷

In another lesson for the same year, on the priesthood of Christ, we find this commentary about the first two chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews: “He who is introduced in the first chapter as Son, God, and Lord, whose deity and eternity are emphasized, meets us in the second chapter as the Son of man, with all the limitations of our common humanity. He is known by His earthly, personal name, and as one who can taste of death (Heb. 2:9), and can be made ‘perfect through sufferings’ (verse 10). He partook of the same flesh and blood which we have (verse 14), becoming just as truly man (verse 17) as He is truly God.”³⁸

In the third quarter of 1921 the same concept is found prominently: “When the Son of God was born of a woman (Gal. 4:4) and partook of our sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), the eternal life was manifested in a human body (1 John 1:2).”³⁹

In 1928 the lessons of the first quarter were based on the Epistle to the Ephesians. Here is the explanatory note in connection with

Ephesians 2:15: “Carnal, natural man cannot abolish his enmity against God. It is a part of his nature. It is intertwined in every fiber of his being. But Jesus took upon Himself our nature of flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14), ‘in all things . . . to be made like unto His brethren’ (Heb. 2:17), ‘of the seed of David according to the flesh’ (Rom. 1:3); ‘He met and abolished in His flesh the enmity,’ ‘the carnal mind’ (Rom. 8:7), ‘the mind of the flesh’ (Rom. 8:7, ASV). He conquered sin in the flesh for us forever.”⁴⁰

Extracts From Selected Books

During the period from 1916 to 1952, several books dealing directly or indirectly with the doctrine of the Incarnation were published by the different publishing houses of the church such as: the *Review and Herald Publishing Association*, the *Pacific Press Publishing Association*, and the *Southern Publishing Association*. All the books published by these publishing houses had to receive the prerequisite stamp of approval by a reading committee certifying the contents to be in harmony with Adventist faith and doctrines.

***The Doctrine of Christ*, by W. W. Prescott**

Recall that Prescott, in his 1920 book *The Doctrine of Christ*, argued that without participating in “the flesh and blood” of those whom He came to deliver from the power of sin and death, Christ could not have been their Saviour. This truth, in the mind of Prescott, was the central truth of the gospel.

***The Life of Victory*, by Meade MacGuire**

In 1924 Meade MacGuire’s book *The Life of Victory* appeared. The author was also the founder of the Youth Department at the General Conference level. He was successively secretary of the Home Missionary and Ministerial departments.⁴¹ In the chapter dealing with the “frightful nature of sin,” MacGuire answers the problem raised by Paul in Romans 7:23: “But I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members.”

“There is only one means of deliverance from this inherent law of sin. That is Christ. He took humanity upon Him. He conquered sin while in a body which had come under the hereditary law of sin. He now proposes to live that same sinless life in my members. His presence completely counteracts the power of the law of sin.”⁴²

In another chapter MacGuire writes: “When Jesus bore the cross, He acknowledged the death sentence upon the sin nature. He took our nature, the Adam nature, the Saul life, and agreeing with the Father that this nature was fit only to die, He went voluntarily to the cross, and bore that fallen nature to its inevitable and necessary death. . . . By this great sacrifice Christ made provision for the death of the Adam nature in you and me, if we are willing to bring this degenerate nature of ours to His cross and nail it there.”⁴³

Facts of Faith, by Christian Edwardson

In 1942 Edwardson took up the subject of the Incarnation and Christ’s human nature from a different angle. He discusses 2 John 7, which states that deceivers and the antichrist “do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh.” In opposition to the argument that the Papacy could not be the Antichrist since Catholicism does not deny Christ’s Incarnation, Edwardson writes:

“This argument, however, is based on a misunderstanding, caused by overlooking one word in the text. Antichrist was not to deny that Christ had come in flesh, but was to deny that He had ‘come in the flesh, in *‘the same’* kind of flesh, as the human race He came to save. . . . On this vital difference hinges the real ‘truth of the gospel.’ Did Christ come *all the way down* to make contact with the fallen race, or only part way, so that we must have saints, popes, and priests intercede for us with Christ who is removed too far from fallen humanity and its needs to make *direct contact with the individual sinner*? Right here lies the great divide that parts Protestantism from Roman Catholicism.”

Edwardson elaborates on the secret of man’s salvation: “Through sin man has separated himself from God, and his fallen nature is opposed to the divine will. . . . Only through Christ, our Mediator, can man be rescued from sin, and again brought into connection with

the source of purity and power. But in order to become such a connecting link Christ had to partake both of the divinity of God and of the humanity of man, so that He with His divine arm could encircle God, and with His human arm embrace man, thus connecting both in His own person. In this union of the human with the divine lies the 'mystery' of the gospel, the secret of power to lift man from his degradation."

Edwardson sought to explain the *why* of Christ's Incarnation: "It was fallen man that was to be rescued from sin. And to make contact with him Christ had to condescend to take *our* nature upon Himself (not some higher kind of flesh). 'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, *he also himself likewise took part of the same.*' . . . 'Wherefore in *all* things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren.' Hebrews 2:14, 17. This text is worded in a way that it cannot be misunderstood. Christ 'took part of the *same* flesh and blood as ours'; He came in 'the' flesh. To deny this is the mark of antichrist."⁴⁴

The Wine of Roman Babylon, by Mary E. Walsh

As suggested by the title, this book contrasts Catholic teaching with that of the Scriptures. Mary E. Walsh, the author, had been for 20 years a fervent Catholic.⁴⁵

In the chapter devoted to *the immaculate conception*, Mary Walsh writes: "All that Mary gave to Christ was His human body. It is a law of nature that one cannot give what one does not possess, and Mary, being human in every aspect of the word, could not impart to her Son the nature of divinity."⁴⁶

Then, having shown both the divine and the human aspect of the nature of Jesus, Mary Walsh quotes Romans 8:3 and Hebrews 2:14, 17, 18, to conclude: "In the genealogy of Christ as given in Matthew we find Jesus called the Son of David and also the Son of Abraham. One has to study only the characters of Abraham and David to learn that they were very human and had a tendency to sin. Thus we see what kind of human nature Christ inherited from His progenitors."⁴⁷

At the beginning of the 1950s several other works were published seeking to explain the *why* of the Incarnation, and what Christ

had accomplished by living a sinless life in a sinful flesh. A. B. Lickey's book *Christ Forever* and W. B. Ochs's book *This I Believe*, both published in 1951 by the Review and Herald Publishing Association,⁴⁸ maintained the traditional Adventist teaching of the past 100 years.

To complete our examination, we will survey two more authors whose testimony is particularly valuable because it came at a time when a radical change was being implemented: F. D. Nichol, editor in chief of the *Review and Herald* from 1945 to 1966, and author of many books; and W. H. Branson, president of the General Conference from 1950 to 1954.

Answers to Objections, by F. D. Nichol⁴⁹

In 1952 Nichol felt compelled to reply to a criticism often leveled against Adventists in these terms: "Seventh-day Adventists teach that, like all mankind, Christ was born with a sinful nature. This plainly indicates that His heart, too, was 'deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked' (Jer. 17:9). In harmony with this they also teach that Christ might have failed while on His mission to earth as man's Saviour—that He came into the world 'at the risk of failure and eternal loss.' But the Bible repeatedly states that Christ was holy, that 'he knew no sin,' and that He would 'not fail nor be discouraged.'" ⁵⁰

Nichol's answer is found, first of all, in two articles in the *Review and Herald*, then reproduced in the book *Answers to Objections*,⁵¹ published in the same year. The preface was written by W. H. Branson, then president of the General Conference. "This volume," he wrote, "gives a clear-cut, convincing answer to the objections most frequently raised by critics of the doctrines held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. . . . With hearty approval, therefore, we recommend this book to every gospel worker. It will prove a ready helper in meeting both the attacks of the theological critics and sincere questions of the perplexed inquirer."⁵²

In his reply, Nichol did not say that the critics were mistaken as to the beliefs of Adventists on the subject. He simply sought to show that these critics were mistaken in concluding that "Seventh-day Adventists are guilty of fearful heresy."⁵³ In truth, remarked

Nichol, "Adventists have never made a formal pronouncement on this matter in their statement of belief. The only pronouncement in our literature that could be considered as truly authoritative on this is what Mrs. E. G. White has written."⁵⁴ Moreover the objectors quote an extract from the book *The Desire of Ages* to prove that they were not mistaken in their judgment, and Nichol does the same to confirm that "Christ had to be made in all things like unto His brethren."

"This is Adventist belief. And we hold this belief because we feel it agrees with revelation and reason." Relying on the usual biblical texts (Rom. 8:3; Hebrews 2:16, 14, 17; and 4:15), Nichol avers, "The objector seeks to avoid the force of these passages by declaring that so far as Christ was concerned 'tempted' simply meant 'tried' or 'tested.' But the texts before us emphasize the fact that the nature of Christ's temptation was exactly the same as that which comes to mankind. True, these scriptures do note one difference—when Christ was tempted He did not sin. That cannot be said of mankind. To a greater or less degree we have all fallen before temptation. The text does not say that Christ could not sin, but that He did not sin. If in His human nature it was impossible for Him to sin, why did not Paul so reveal these texts before us? It would have been a great revelation."⁵⁵

Then Nichol goes on to show that Adventists are not the only ones to hold this point of view. He quotes a galaxy of theologians of different Protestant denominations before concluding: "The Adventist belief concerning Christ is that He was truly divine and truly human, that His human nature was subjected to the same temptations to sin that confront us, that He triumphed over temptation through the power given Him of His Father, and that He may most literally be described as 'holy, harmless, undefiled' (Heb. 7:26)."⁵⁶

Some of Nichol's expressions elsewhere have led some to think he was a supporter of the new interpretation which arose about this time.⁵⁷ But what he wrote on the subject of the temptations of Christ suggests this was not the case. Note his comparison between the two Adams: "Christ won despite the fact that He took on Him 'the likeness of sinful flesh,' with all that that implies of the baleful and weakening effects of sin on the body and nervous system of man

and its effects on his environment—‘can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?’”⁵⁸

In a note added to Objection 94, Nichol explained the expression “sinful flesh”: “Critics, especially those who see the Scriptures through Calvinistic eyes, read into the term ‘sinful flesh’ something that Adventist theology does not require. Thus if we use the term ‘sinful flesh’ in regard to Christ’s human nature, as some of our writers have done, we lay ourselves open to misunderstanding. True, we mean by that term simply that Christ ‘took on him the seed of Abraham,’ and was made ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh,’ but critics are not willing to believe this.”⁵⁹

According to the testimony of Kenneth H. Wood, longtime associate editor under F. D. Nichol, and his successor as editor in chief from 1966 to 1982, Nichol always supported, in conversations and discussions, the belief that Christ came into this world with man’s fallen nature. That would explain why Walter Martin declared: “The General Conference wisely separated Nichol from myself. He was prohibited from making contact with me.”⁶⁰

The Atonement and Drama of the Ages, by W. H. Branson

The point of view expressed by W. H. Branson in various articles is confirmed in two of his books. In the first, *The Atonement*, published in 1935, he states what had always been the teaching of the church up until then. “Christ, the Son of God, the Creator of the universe, took upon Himself our nature, and became a man. He was born of a woman. He became ‘the seed of Abraham.’ He became one of us.”⁶¹

In 1953, while Branson was president of the General Conference, and probably aware of an emerging new interpretation, he wrote in his last work, *Drama of the Ages*: “It was of man’s flesh and blood that Jesus partook. He became a member of the human race. He became just like men. . . . This, then, was real humanity. It was not the nature of angels that He assumed, but that of Abraham. He was ‘in all things made like unto his brethren.’ He became one of them. He was subject to temptation; He knew the pangs of suffering, and was not a stranger to man’s common woes.”⁶²

Then W. H. Branson explains his position with regards to the *why* of Christ's participation in the fallen nature of mankind: "In order for Christ to understand the weakness of human nature, He had to experience it. In order for Him to be sympathetic with men in their trials, He also had to be tried. He must suffer hunger, weariness, disappointment, sorrow, and persecution. He must tread the same paths, live under the same circumstances, and die the same death. Therefore He became bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh. His Incarnation was in actual humanity."⁶³

Conclusion

Our research covering a century of Adventist Christology from 1852 to 1952 allows us to affirm that the theologians and administrators of the church have spoken with one voice on the subject of the person of Christ and His work on behalf of man's salvation.

Although at first we find semi-Arian sentiments on the subject of Christ's divine nature among church leaders, these were abandoned prior to the turn of the century. On the other hand, on the point of the human nature of Jesus there was no divergence. Since the beginning the Adventist Church showed remarkable unanimity in its systematic teaching on this subject. Their study of the New Testament led the pioneers of the message and their followers to understand the Incarnation as not merely involving the belief that Jesus came in the flesh, but above all in "a flesh like unto sinful flesh." And because this teaching was radically opposed to the tradition of established churches, it was necessary to repeat it consistently for the benefit of the new converts to the Adventist message. This doctrine was considered as "the touchstone of authentic Christianity," as "the golden chain in which are set the jewels of doctrine," "as the doctrine of doctrines," in short, as "the vital point of the regenerative and redemptive religion of Jesus."

About 1950, however, a new interpretation arose: Christ did not take the fallen nature of humanity but rather that of Adam before the Fall. Of course, such a drastic change of interpretation met with spirited reaction. It is therefore very important to consider this new step in the history of Adventist Christology to understand the actual

causes of the controversy eating away at the very heart of the church. More important, it is necessary to sharpen the ability to discern between teaching that agrees with the gospel from that which does not. This is a consequential point indeed, because according to the apostle John, the test of the true Spirit of God centers precisely upon the concept of Christ come in the flesh (1 John 4:1-3).

References and Notes

¹Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 10. (Italics supplied.) Originally in *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White* (Mountain View, Calif., Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1915), p. 196.

²Joseph E. Steed, in *Review and Herald*, Sept. 6, 1917.

³R. S. Owen, in *Review and Herald*, May 29, 1924.

⁴J. A. Rippey, in *Signs of the Times*, May 5, 1924.

⁵L. A. Wilcox, in *Signs of the Times*, Mar. 22, 1927.

⁶E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117.

⁷Wilcox, in *Signs of the Times*, March 22, 1927.

⁸W. W. Prescott, in *Australian Signs of the Times* Jan. 7, 1924; May 4, 1936; Aug. 7, 1936; in *Review and Herald* May 1, 1924; Aug. 22, 1929; Nov. 6, 1930; Feb. 27, 1936; Apr. 15, 1937; in *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 15, 1929; Feb. 22, 1929.

⁹W. H. Branson, in *The Watchman*, July, August, 1932; *Australian Signs of the Times*, Oct. 30, 1933; Nov. 1, 1937.

¹⁰———, in *The Watchman*, August 1933.

¹¹———, *Signs of the Times*, Nov. 8, 1936.

¹²———, *The Watchman*, July 1932.

¹³A. V. Olson was first president of the Latin Union (1917-1920), then president of the Southern European Division (1920-1946), and finally vice president of the General Conference. He was the author of *Thirteen Crisis Years, 1888-1901* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1966).

¹⁴———, in *Review and Herald*, Aug. 6, 1942.

¹⁵———, in *Ministry*, January 1962. Quoted in *The Incarnation of Christ*, study published by Fred C. Metz, (September 1964).

¹⁶M. V. Campbell, in *Review and Herald*, Oct. 5, 1950.

¹⁷Our research is limited to the Southern European Division, comprising the following countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Greece, Hungary, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Rumania, Spain, Switzerland, Yugoslavia, and the French colonies in Africa.

¹⁸This particular aspect of Adventist Christology was not included in the courses of our theological seminaries. In his manual on doctrine, *L'Histoire du Salut*, Alfred Vaucher simply affirms that Jesus became human.

¹⁹Jules Boureau, in *Signes des Temps*, May 1950.

²⁰Tell Nussbaum was president of the Conference of the Adventist churches in France (1910-1914). He was the father of Dr. Jean Nussbaum, known worldwide for his activity on behalf of religious liberty and as founder of the magazine *Conscience et Liberté*.

²¹Tell Nussbaum, in *Revue Adventiste*, Nov. 15, 1923.

²²*Revue Adventiste*, Dec. 1 and 15, 1925; Jan. 1 and 15, 1926.

²³Jules-Cesar Guenin, *Une pierre de touche; Jesus-Christ venu en chair* (Dammarie-les-Lys:

Imprimerie les Signes des Temps, n.d.). See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, pp. 544, 545.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 4, 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 5; See Ellen White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

²⁹ ———, in *Revue Adventiste*, Dec. 15, 1925.

³⁰ ———, in *Revue Adventiste*, January 1942.

³¹ ———, in *Signes des Temps*, July, August, and September, 1938.

³² James Howard, *Revue Adventiste*, July 15, 1927.

³³ B. E. Beddoe, *Revue Adventiste*, Jan. 15, 1929.

³⁴ Charles Gerber was at the time editor in chief of the periodicals *Signes des Temps* (1933-1940), *Revue Adventiste* (1933-1939), and *Vie et Santé* (1939-1969).

³⁵ Gerber, *Le chemin du salut* (Dammarie-les-Lys: Imprimerie les Signes des Temps, n.d.).

³⁶ ———, *Signes des Temps*, October 1937.

³⁷ *Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly*, senior division, first quarter 1921, p. 16.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, second quarter 1921, pp. 13, 14.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, third quarter 1921, p. 20.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, first quarter 1928, p. 15. All examples quoted by William H. Grotheer, *Interpretive History of SDA Doctrine of Incarnation*, pp. 56, 57.

⁴¹ Meade Macquire, see *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, p. 825.

⁴² ———, *The Life of Victory* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1924), pp. 17, 18.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴⁴ Christian Edwardson, *Facts of Faith* (Nashville, Tenn.: Southern Pub. Assn., 1942), pp. 204, 205, in William H. Grotheer, *Interpretive History of SDA Doctrine of Incarnation*, pp. 58, 59.

⁴⁵ Mary E. Walsh, *The Wine of Babylon*, p. 3, in William H. Grotheer, *Interpretive History of SDA Doctrine of Incarnation*, pp. 59, 60.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁴⁸ A. E. Lickey, *Christ Forever* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1951). W. B. Ochs, *This I Believe* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1951).

⁴⁹ See *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, article F. D. Nichol, pp. 974, 975. Concurrently with his long career as chief editor of the *Review and Herald*, he was also the editor of *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. He authored some 20 books.

⁵⁰ Nichol, *Review and Herald*, July 10 and 17, 1952.

⁵¹ Nichol, *Answers to Objections* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1952), Objection 94, pp. 389-397.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 24.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 390.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 391.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

⁵⁷ See William H. Grotheer, *Interpretive History of SDA Doctrine of Incarnation*, pp. 70-72; and Ralph Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh*, pp. 221-223.

⁵⁸ Nichol, *Ibid.*, p. 393.

⁵⁹ ———, *Answers to Objections*, p. 397.

⁶⁰ See Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh*, p. 223; *Adventist Currents*, July 1983, p. 18.

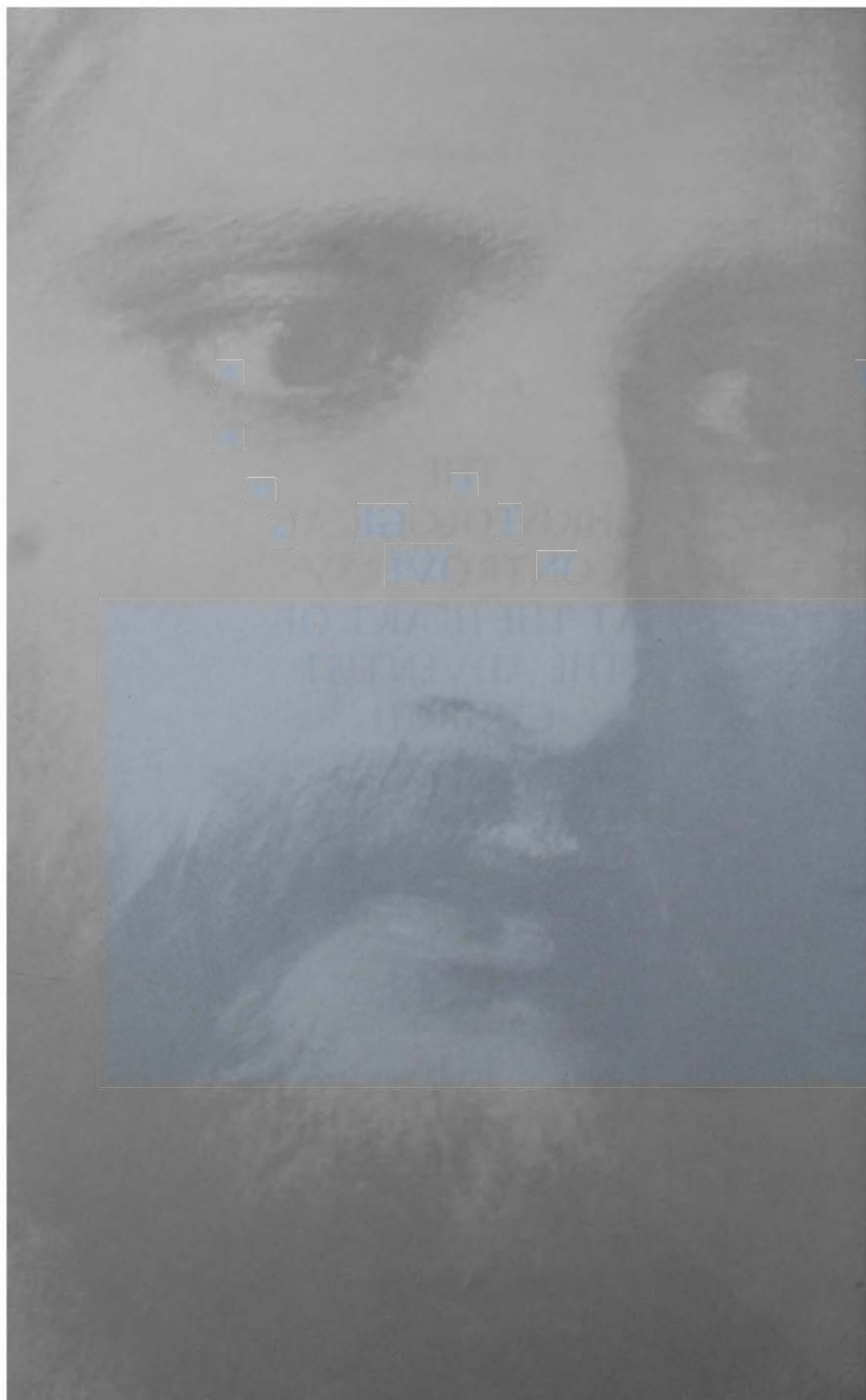
⁶¹ Branson, *The Atonement* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1935), p. 14.

⁶²———, *Drama of the Ages* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1980), pp. 97, 98.

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Part IV

THE
CHRISTOLOGICAL
CONTROVERSY
AT THE HEART OF
THE ADVENTIST
CHURCH



“ADVENTISM’S NEW MILESTONE”

Throughout the history of Christianity changes in doctrine have generally taken place slowly, subtly, and imperceptibly. It is often very difficult to determine the origin of these changes, or those who were responsible for them. But such is not the case with the doctrinal change about the human nature of Jesus that took place in the Adventist Church during the 1950s. Those chiefly responsible for the change have left their mark upon the beliefs of the church.

It seems obvious that the authors of this change were fully aware that they were introducing a new teaching of the doctrine regarding the Incarnation. This is spelled out in the report of the circumstances disclosed by LeRoy Edwin Froom in his book *Movement of Destiny*;¹ and in an account which could be considered as the manifesto of this new interpretation, published in *Ministry* under the title “Adventism’s New Milestone.”² This chapter will focus on the history of this new view, as traced in these sources.

I do not wish to question my colleagues’ commitment to truth or loyalty to the church. I am sure they love the Lord and His Word. But I must question certain doctrinal approaches, seeking to do so in Christian kindness.

The First Milestone of a Radical Change

In 1949 the Review and Herald Publishing Association requested Professor D. E. Rebok, president of the Adventist Theological

Seminary, Washington, D.C., to review the text of the book *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*,³ in preparation for a new edition.

This book, which had appeared in numerous editions, was widely used by Adventist families in the systematic study of the Bible. It presented the official teaching of the church in great detail. As we have shown earlier, the 1915 edition, reprinted in 1936 and in 1945, stipulated unequivocally, "In His humanity Christ partook of our *sinful, fallen nature*. If not, then He was not 'made like unto his brethren,' was not 'in all points tempted like as we are,' did not overcome as we have to overcome, and is not, therefore, the complete and perfect Saviour that man needs and must have to be saved."⁴

Froom remarks about Rebok: "Coming upon this unfortunate note on page 174, in the study about the 'Sinless Life,' he recognized that this was not true. . . . So the inaccurate note was deleted, and has remained out in all subsequent printings."⁵ As a result, the new edition of *Bible Readings* gives a new answer to the question: "How fully did Christ share our common humanity?" The answer cites Hebrews 2:17, with the following explanatory remark: "Jesus Christ is both Son of God and Son of man. As a member of the human family 'it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren'—'in the likeness of sinful flesh.' Just how far that 'likeness' goes is a mystery of the Incarnation which men have never been able to solve. The Bible clearly teaches that Christ was tempted just as other men are tempted—'in all points . . . like as we are.' Such temptation must necessarily include the possibility of sinning; but Christ was without sin. There is no Bible support for the teaching that the mother of Christ, by an immaculate conception, was cut off from the sinful inheritance of race, and therefore her divine Son was incapable of sinning."⁶

This is a significant difference from the 1946 edition. While the older version underlines the participation of Christ in "man's sinful nature," in "his fallen nature," the latter strongly affirms that "Christ was without sin." Obviously, the affirmation is perfectly correct. No one has ever claimed otherwise. But that is not the question. The question is about Christ's humanity, about His "sinful flesh," as Paul puts it.

As has been pointed out,⁷ by rejecting the dogma of the immac-

ulate conception and stating that Mary had naturally inherited the blemishes inherent in humanity, Rebok leaves unexplained how Jesus did not Himself inherit sinful flesh, like all the descendants of Adam. Does not Paul expressly say that He was born "of the seed of David, according to the flesh"?

Rebok, in his editing of *Bible Readings*, also altered a second explanatory note, in answer to the question "Where did God, in Christ, condemn sin, and gain the victory for us over temptation and sin?"⁸ The two explanatory notes, from two different editions, are placed in parallel for comparison below:

1946 Edition	Rebok's Revised Text
"God, in Christ, condemned sin, not by pronouncing against it merely as a judge sitting on the judgment-seat, but by coming and living <i>in the flesh, in sinful flesh</i> , and yet without sinning. In Christ, He demonstrated that it is possible, by His grace and power, to resist temptation, overcome sin, and live <i>a sinless life in sinful flesh</i> ."	"God, in Christ, condemned sin, not by pronouncing against it merely as a judge sitting on the judgment-seat, but by coming and living <i>in the flesh</i> , (omission) and yet without sinning. In Christ, He demonstrated that it is possible, by His grace and power, to resist temptation, overcome sin, and live <i>a sinless life in (omission) the flesh</i> ."

The differences between the two notes are small yet significant. Paul's expression "sinful flesh" (KJV) is omitted. This revised edition of *Bible Readings* did not appear, however, until 1958, after the new interpretation had been nurtured by a series of articles in the *Ministry*, a magazine published specifically for the ministers.

Rejection of the "Erroneous" Ideas of the Past

The events that led to the new interpretation of Christ's human nature are well known. A strong proponent, LeRoy Edwin Froom, has recorded the circumstances down to the smallest details.⁹ It all began in January 1955, when a statement appeared in the evangelical periodical *Our Hope* declaring that the Seventh-day Adventist Church "disparages the Person and work of Christ," in teaching that Christ in His humanity "partook of our sinful, fallen nature." The point of view of Schuyler English, editor of the periodical, was that

Christ did not partake of the fallen nature of other men.¹⁰ According to Froom, English had been misled by the old edition of *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*.

Froom immediately wrote English, noting that he was mistaken as to the Adventist position on Christ's human nature. "The old Colcord minority-view note in *Bible Readings*—contending for an inherent sinful, fallen nature for Christ—had years before been expunged because of its error."¹¹

At the close of this correspondence, English was convinced that he had been mistaken. He issued a correction in the magazine *Our Hope* on the subject. Some months later he published an article by Walter R. Martin, a Baptist theologian, who, after a seven-year study of Adventists, had concluded: "To charge the majority of Adventists today with holding these heretical views is *unfair, inaccurate, and decidedly unchristian*."¹²

After his initial contacts with English, Froom was introduced to Donald Grey Barnhouse, a Presbyterian pastor and editor of the periodical *Eternity* of Philadelphia, and to Walter Martin, who was eager for information about Adventists to wrap up his book *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventists*.¹³ From 1955 to 1956 a series of 18 conferences took place between evangelicals and Adventists for the purpose of discussing the doctrine of the Incarnation.

When the topic of Christ's human nature was presented, the Adventist representatives affirmed, according to Barnhouse's report, that "the majority of the denomination has always held [the humanity assumed by Christ] to be sinless, holy, and perfect despite the fact that certain of their writers have occasionally gotten into print with contrary views completely repugnant to the church at large."¹⁴

According to this report, the Adventist representatives disclosed to Walter Martin that "they had among their number certain members of their '*lunatic fringe*,' even as there are similar *wild-eyed irresponsibles* in every field of fundamental Christianity."¹⁵ Obviously the Adventist representatives gave the impression that there were some irresponsible lunatics who had written that Christ had taken upon Himself fallen human nature.

In reading Froom's report of these meetings, one is struck by his

strong desire to see Adventists portrayed as authentic Christians. The subtitles of his report alone are revealing: "Walter Martin Affirms SDAs Are Brothers in Christ"; "Adventists Are 'Most Decidedly' Christians." He even said that the evangelicals now view this change of attitude as the result of "Early Faulty Views 'Totally Repudiated.'" ¹⁶

The Manifesto of the New Christology

While these meetings were taking place it was agreed that the results of the discussions would be published simultaneously in the official periodicals of both groups. The new Adventist interpretation, as a matter of fact, was published in the *Ministry* of September 1956, under the general title "Counsels of the Spirit of Prophecy." In support of the new interpretation, eight pages of Ellen White quotations were carefully selected to define "the nature of Christ at the Incarnation."

Under this title we find expressed in bold type the essential points of the manifesto: "He Took Our Human Nature, Not Our Sinful Propensities; Our Sin, Guilt, and Punishment All Imputed to Him, but Not Actually His."¹⁷ The related text does a good job of summarizing the different aspects of the new Christology. The titles of the seven sections reveal the general notion: "I. The Mystery of Incarnation; II. Miraculous Union of Human and Divine; III. Took Sinless Human Nature; IV. Assumed Liabilities of Human Nature; V. Tempted on All Points; VI. Bore the Imputed Sin and Guilt of the World; VII. Perfect Sinlessness of Christ's Human Nature."

The subtitles of each section also convey the prominent position given to the fundamental concepts regarding Christ's human nature: "Christ took humanity as God created it"; "Began where Adam first began"; "Took human form but not corrupted sinful nature"; "Took Adam's sinless human nature"; "Perfect sinlessness of His human nature"; "Inherited no evil propensities from Adam"; and such others.¹⁸

The explanatory notes for each of these affirmations are all drawn from Ellen White's writings. There is not a single reference to a Bible text. This was a new slant on the subject, for up until this time the discussion had been founded on the Scriptures. This would

open the door to the coming controversy because it would become essentially a problem of defining the meaning of the Ellen White statements. This was also Morris Venden's opinion: "I think that the heaviest semantic problem that we have today is on the nature of Christ. And to me it seems that it is so heavily semantic that it is almost impossible to work on the subject."¹⁹ That is why Roy Allan Anderson, secretary of the Ministerial Association of the General Conference and chief editor of *Ministry*, thought it necessary to introduce the following account, which represents truly the characterization of the new Adventist Christology.²⁰

"Human, but Not Carnal"

Such is the title of Anderson's editorial. Here is his view on the subject of Christ's human nature: "Throughout our denominational history we have not always had as clear an understanding of this subject as would have been helpful. In fact, this particular point in Adventist theology has drawn severe censure from many outstanding biblical scholars both inside and outside our ranks. Through the years statements have been made in sermons, and occasionally some have appeared in print, that, taken at their value, have disparaged the person and work of Christ Jesus our Lord. We have been charged with making Him altogether human."²¹

Citing numerous carefully selected quotations of Ellen White as evidence, Anderson affirmed "that our Lord partook of our limited human nature, but not our corrupt, carnal nature with all its propensities to sin and lust. *In Him was no sin, either inherited or cultivated*, as is common to all the natural descendants of Adam."²²

Anderson declared also that "in only three or four places in all these inspired counsels" of Ellen White does she use "such expressions as 'fallen nature' and 'sinful nature.'" But he added, "these are strongly counterbalanced and clearly explained by many other statements that reveal the thought of the writer [Ellen G. White]. Christ did indeed partake of our *nature*, our *human* nature with all of its physical limitations, but not of our *carnal* nature with its lustful corruptions. When He entered the human family, it was after the race had been greatly weakened by degeneracy. For thousands of years

mankind had been physically deteriorating. Compared with Adam and his immediate posterity, humanity, when God appeared in human form, was stunted in stature, longevity, and vitality. . . . When He took upon Him *sinless human nature*, He did not cease to be God. True, we cannot understand that, but we can accept it by faith."²³

In this same editorial, Anderson further alludes to the statement which "appeared in *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* (1915 edition), which declared that Christ came 'in sinful flesh.' Just how this expression slipped into the book is difficult to know. It has been quoted many times by critics, and all around the world, as being typical of Adventist Christology."²⁴

In the end, Anderson calls upon the ministerial team "to carefully and prayerfully study the Counsel section in this issue. But let us do it with the same open mind that we recognize is so important in the study of the fundamental themes of the Bible."²⁵

"Adventism's New Milestone"

Associate Editor Louise C. Kleuser published another editorial on the subject, designed to promote the platform she called "Adventism's new milestone."²⁶ She heralded the changes, first in regard to our relations with "our evangelical brethren in Christ" from whom "we are trying to learn some lessons,"²⁷ and then with regard to Christ's human nature, treated by Anderson in a second part of the editorial.

According to Anderson, "there is nothing more clearly taught in the Scripture than that when God became man through the Incarnation He partook of the nature of man; that is, He took upon Himself human nature. In Romans 1:3 we read that Jesus Christ was born 'of the seed of David according to the flesh,' and in Galatians 4:4, that He was 'made of a woman.' He became a son of humanity by a human birth and submitted Himself to the conditions of human existence, possessing a human body (Heb. 2:14)."²⁸

However, "when we read of Jesus Christ taking the nature of man, it is imperative that we recognize the difference between human nature in the physical sense of the word, and human nature in the theological meaning of the term. He was indeed a man, but withal He

was God manifest in the flesh. True, He took our human nature, that is, our physical form, but He did not possess our sinful propensities.”²⁹

Finally, Anderson insists that the difference between the first Adam and the Second Adam was not one of nature, but rather a *simple difference of situation*. “When the incarnate God broke into human history and became one with the race, it is our understanding that He possessed the sinlessness of the nature with which Adam was created in Eden. The environment in which Jesus lived, however, was tragically different from that which Adam knew before the Fall.”³⁰

As a result, concludes Anderson, “*our sins were imputed to Him*. And so *vicariously* He *took* our sinful, fallen nature, died in our stead, and was ‘numbered with the transgressors’ (Isa. 58:12). Sin was laid upon Him; it was never a part of Him. It was outward, not inward. Whatever He *took* was not His inherently; He *took* it, that is, He accepted it. ‘*He voluntarily assumed human nature*. It was His own act, and by His own consent’ (Ellen G. White, in *Review and Herald*, July 5, 1887; italics supplied).”³¹

In the same *Ministry* is an article by W. E. Read, who sided with Anderson and Froom. Under the title “The Incarnation and the Son of Man,” Read presents a summary of Christology. For each of his declarations, he quotes the suitable Bible texts, followed by a passage from Ellen White’s writings. However, Read also suggested the word “vicariously” as a key term of the new Christology to enable us to understand Christ’s human nature.

Assuredly, he writes, “*Christ was tempted in all points as we are*. This is a wonderful, comforting thought. But let us ever remember that although it is true, it is also true that He was ‘without sin’ (Heb. 4:15). His being tempted, however, did not contaminate the Son of God. He bore our weaknesses, our temptations, *vicariously*, in the same way He bore our iniquities.”³²

These articles were intended to prepare minds to receive “the new milestone of Adventism,” as it was to be developed in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*. On the eve of its appearance, Anderson proclaimed it in the *Ministry* as the most wonderful book ever published by the church.³³ Since it deals with the

human nature of Christ in detail, we need to examine this book more closely.

Questions on Doctrine

This book is the result of the meetings held with evangelical representatives Donald Grey Barnhouse and Walter R. Martin. Martin was about to print his book *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism*, published in 1960.³⁴

Questions on Doctrine does not deal only with the doctrine of the Incarnation. It is a response to the numerous doctrinal questions typically asked by evangelicals on the subjects of "salvation by grace versus salvation by works, the distinction between moral and ceremonial law, the antitype of the scapegoat, the identity of Michael—and so on through a wide range of fundamental Adventist beliefs and practices, covering doctrine and prophecy."³⁵

Martin and Barnhouse particularly objected to the positions taken by Adventist pioneers in relation with the divinity of Christ and the human nature of Jesus, which they quite frankly deemed to be erroneous and heretical. It was not at all surprising, then, that they asked if on these points the official position had changed.³⁶ Specific questions in regard to the Incarnation were posed: "What do Adventists understand by Christ's use of the title 'Son of man'? And what do you consider to have been the basic purpose of the Incarnation?"³⁷

In response, almost all Bible texts relating to Christology were quoted. As to the explanatory notes, they were generally made on the basis of quotations from Ellen White. The Adventist officials did their best to show that "the writings of Ellen G. White are entirely in harmony with the Scriptures on this."³⁸ It was not denied that Christ "was the second Adam, coming in the 'likeness' of sinful human flesh (Rom. 8:3)";³⁹ or that Ellen White had used expressions like "human nature," "our sinful nature," "our fallen nature," "man's nature in its fallen condition."⁴⁰

No one argues that "Jesus was diseased or that He experienced the frailties to which our fallen human nature is heir. But He did *bear* all this. Could it not be that He bore this *vicariously* also, just as He bore the sins of the whole world? These weaknesses, frailties, infir-

mities, failings are things which we, with our sinful, fallen natures, have to bear. To us they are natural, inherent, but when He bore them, He took them not as something innately His, but He bore them as our substitute. He bore them in His perfect, sinless nature. Again we remark, Christ bore all this vicariously, just as vicariously He bore the iniquities of us all.”⁴¹

In brief, “whatever Jesus took was not His intrinsically or innately. . . . All that Jesus took, all that He *bore*, whether the burden and penalty of our iniquities, or the diseases and frailties of our human nature—all was taken and borne *vicariously*.”⁴²

This expression is indeed the magic formula contained in “the new milestone of Adventism.” According to the authors of *Questions on Doctrine*, “it is in this sense that all should understand the writings of Ellen G. White when she refers *occasionally* to sinful, fallen, and deteriorated human nature.”⁴³

The authors of the book published, in an appendix,⁴⁴ some 66 quotations from Ellen White divided into sections with subtitles such as: “Took Sinless Human Nature,”⁴⁵ or “Perfect Sinlessness of Christ’s Human Nature.” Such phrases were, of course, never written by Ellen White.⁴⁶

It is clear that “the new milestone of Adventism” differs significantly from the traditional teaching about Christ’s human nature in four ways. It claims that:

1. Christ took Adam’s spiritual nature before the Fall; that is to say, a sinless human nature.
2. Christ inherited only the physical consequences of the sinful human nature; that is to say, His genetic heredity was reduced by 4,000 years of sin.
3. The difference between Christ’s temptation and Adam’s rested solely in the difference of the environment and circumstances but not in a difference of nature.
4. Christ bore the sins of the world vicariously, not in reality, but only as a substitute for sinful man, without participating in his sinful nature.

Presented as it was with the apparent seal of approval of the General Conference,⁴⁷ the book *Seventh-day Adventists Answer*

Questions on Doctrine was widely distributed in seminaries, universities, and public libraries.⁴⁸ Thousands of copies were sent to members of the clergy as well as to non-Adventist theology professors.⁴⁹ The almost 140,000 copies published had a distinct influence both outside and within the Adventist Church.⁵⁰

The publication of this book produced a shock effect to which the reactions were not long in coming. It had hardly come off the press when it became the object of a lively controversy, which continued in intensity through the years down to our days. We will cover this in the next chapters of this study. But first it is imperative to mention here a crucial Ellen White letter that has served as one of the main underpinnings of the new theology.

Ellen White's Letter to William L. H. Baker

In 1895, while she was still in Australia, Ellen White wrote a long letter of encouragement to William Baker who was in charge of the work in Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand. He was a man whom she greatly appreciated and of whom she gave a positive account.

Before leaving the United States for Australia, Baker had worked at the Pacific Press in California from 1882 to 1887. For four years he was Waggoner's assistant. In 1914 he was appointed as professor of Bible in Avondale College in Australia. On returning to the United States in 1922, he finished his career as a professor and chaplain. He died in 1933.⁵¹

This letter to Baker comprised 19 handwritten pages, of which two entire pages are devoted to errors to be avoided in the public presentation of the human nature of Christ. This letter, like many other private letters, was never published in the *Testimonies for the Church*, as some were. Preserved in the archives of the E. G. White Estate, this letter was not known by researchers until 1955. After it was discovered, the supporters of the new interpretation realized that its content appeared to condemn the traditional position and to support the new point of view concerning Christ's human nature.

The five paragraphs devoted to Christ's human nature were published in 1956 in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* as an explanatory note on chapter 1 of John's Gospel.⁵² In 1957 a selec-

tion of quotations was made also in the book *Questions on Doctrine*.⁵³ In view of the importance given to the content of this letter⁵⁴ it is important to quote here the most significant and controversial paragraphs of the letter:

“Be careful, exceedingly careful as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ. Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities of sin. He is the second Adam. The first Adam was created a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon him: he was in the image of God. He could fall, and he did fall through transgressing. Because of sin his posterity was born with inherent propensities of disobedience. But Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. He took upon Himself human nature, and was tempted in all points as human nature is tempted. He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity.”⁵⁵

“Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ, or that He in any way yielded to corruption. He was tempted in all points like as man is tempted, yet He is called ‘that holy thing.’ . . . Let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be. . . . We should have no misgivings in regard to the perfect sinlessness of the human nature of Christ.”⁵⁶

These statements have played, and still play, a decisive role in favor of the new interpretation. The testimony of Robert J. Spangler, who in 1967 became chief editor of *Ministry*, is especially significant. “In the light of this statement I personally have had to admit that whatever type of sinful nature Christ had (if He had such), it had no propensity, no natural inclination, tendency, or bent toward evil.”⁵⁷

Supporters of the traditional position quote the Baker statement without concluding that Jesus was free from all “hereditary tendencies.” Obviously, both sides cannot be right. We will return later to the Baker letter.

Since the publication of *Questions on Doctrine* the Adventist Church has experienced serious theological controversy. Some con-

sider it a fundamental crisis, while others consider it to be nothing more than a simple difference of opinion. Whatever it may be, an evaluation of the prevailing theses is imperative. This is what we shall attempt in Part V, but it is important for us first to analyze in detail the assumptions made by both sides.

References and Notes

- ¹ Leroy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny*.
- ² Roy Allan Anderson, in *Ministry*, April 1957.
- ³ The first edition of *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* dates back to the 1880s.
- ⁴ *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* (1915), p. 115. (Italics supplied.)
- ⁵ Froom, p. 428.
- ⁶ *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* (1958), pp. 143, 144.
- ⁷ William H. Grotheer, *Interpretive History of SDA Doctrine of Incarnation*, p. 65.
- ⁸ A comparison made by Grotheer, pp. 65, 66.
- ⁹ Froom, pp. 468-475.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 469.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 473.
- ¹³ Walter R. Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960).
- ¹⁴ Donald Grey Barnhouse, "Are Seventh-day Adventists Christians?" *Eternity*, September 1956. Quoted by Grotheer, p. 75.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.* (Italics supplied.)
- ¹⁶ Froom, pp. 472, 473. The same concept is found in Anderson's editorial.
- ¹⁷ Anderson, in *Ministry*, September 1956.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Morris L. Venden, in *Insight*, May 15, 1979.
- ²⁰ This article by Anderson in *Ministry*, September 1956, was also published in the appendix of *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1957), pp. 647-660, and *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A, pp. 647-660.
- ²¹ Anderson, in *Ministry*, September 1956.
- ²² *Ibid.*
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.* *Bible Readings for the Home Circle* was revised in 1949, not 1946.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ Anderson, in *Ministry*, April 1957.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² W. E. Read, in *Ministry*, April 1957.
- ³³ Anderson, in *Ministry*, July 1957.
- ³⁴ Walter R. Martin, *The Truth About Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan

Pub. House, 1960).

³⁵ Froom, p. 481.

³⁶ *Questions on Doctrine*, p. 29.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 60.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 61, 62.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 60. (Italics supplied.)

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 647-660.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 650, 658.

⁴⁶ Ralph Larson, in his book *The Word Was Made Flesh*, offers \$1,000 to anyone who finds an Ellen White quotation stating that Christ came to earth in Adam's nature before the Fall (p. 274).

⁴⁷ Froom took pains to note that it was not a matter of "official" decision. *Movement of Destiny*, p. 492.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 488-492.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 489.

⁵¹ See *Review and Herald*, May 30, 1933.

⁵² See *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1128, 1129.

⁵³ See *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 621, 651, 652.

⁵⁴ Ellen G. White letter 8, 1895.

⁵⁵ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1128.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1128, 1129; *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 652, 651.

⁵⁷ Robert J. Spangler, in *Ministry*, April 1978, p. 23.

FIRST REACTIONS TO THE BOOK *QUESTIONS ON DOCTRINE*

As might be expected, the new interpretation of Ellen White's statements on the subject of Christ's human nature provoked lively reaction. The more outspoken denounced what they saw as errors of interpretation, while others quietly confirmed the teaching of the church since its origin. These reactions to the book *Questions on Doctrine* deserve our close attention.

Traditional Christology Authenticated by *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*

Between 1953 and 1957, while unofficial meetings between three or four Adventists and two or three evangelicals were taking place, about 40 theologians under the leadership of Francis D. Nichol were working on *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. We do not know what the individual position of the various commentators might have been concerning Christ's human nature. But we do know the two New Testament Epistles that deal most directly with Christology were assigned to theologians who were ardent defenders of the traditional position: M. L. Andreasen (Hebrews) and A. G. Maxwell (Romans).

Although the seven-volume commentary was published in 1957, the very same year as *Questions on Doctrine*, no trace of the new theology is found in it. On the contrary, many of the supplemental Ellen White statements found in the back of each volume tend to confirm the historical position. Here are several typical examples:

Genesis 3:15: "The King of glory proposed to humble Himself to fallen humanity! He would place His feet in Adam's steps. He would take man's fallen nature, and engage to cope with the strong foe who triumphed over Adam."¹

Isaiah 53:2, 3: "Think of Christ's humiliation. He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin. . . . He endured all the temptations wherewith man is beset. . . . 'The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us,' because by doing so He could associate with the sinful, sorrowing sons and daughters of Adam."²

Matthew 4:1-4: "The Redeemer, in whom was united both the human and the divine, stood in Adam's place, and endured a terrible fast of nearly six weeks. The length of this fast is the strongest evidence of the extent of the sinfulness and power of debased appetite upon the human family."³

Matthew 4:1-11: "Here Christ overcame in the sinner's behalf four thousand years after Adam turned his back upon the light of his home. . . . Christ bore the sins and infirmities of the race as they existed when He came to the earth to help man. In behalf of the race, with the weaknesses of fallen man upon Him, He was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points wherewith man would be assailed. . . . And in order to elevate fallen man, Christ must reach him where he was. He took human nature, and bore the infirmities and degeneracy of the race. He, who knew no sin, became sin for us."⁴

Luke 22:44: "It was not a make-believe humanity that Christ took upon Himself. He took human nature and lived human nature. . . . He took our infirmities. He was not only made flesh, but He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh."⁵

John 1:1-3, 14: Under this text, five paragraphs of Ellen White's letter to Baker are quoted. We shall return to this letter later, because it is the principal document upon which the supporters of the new Christology rely. In addition, however, the following statement is cited: "He [Christ] took upon Himself human nature, and was tempted in all points as human nature is tempted. He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity. . . . It is a mystery that is left unexplained to

mortals that Christ could be tempted in all points like as we are, and yet be without sin. . . . He did humble Himself when He was in fashion as a man, that He might understand the force of all temptations wherewith man is beset.”⁶

Romans 5:12-19: “In human flesh He went into the wilderness to be tempted by the enemy. . . . He knows the weakness and the infirmities of the flesh. He was tempted in all points like as we are tempted.”⁷

Romans 8:1-3: “Christ met, overcame, and condemned sin in the sphere in which it had previously exercised its dominion and mastery. The flesh, the scene of sin’s former triumphs, now became the scene of its defeat and expulsion.”⁸

Philippians 2:5-8: “The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden linked chain which binds our souls to Christ and through Christ to God.”⁹

Hebrews 2:14-16: “In Christ were united the divine and the human—the Creator and the creature. The nature of God, whose law had been transgressed, and the nature of Adam, the transgressor, meet in Jesus—the Son of God, and the Son of man.”¹⁰

Hebrews 4:15: “Christ’s overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord. When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflict with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity.”¹¹

“Satan showed his knowledge of the weak points of the human heart, and put forth his utmost power to take advantage of the weakness of the humanity which Christ had assumed in order to overcome his temptations on man’s account.”¹²

“We need not place the obedience of Christ by itself, as something for which He was specially adapted, by His particular divine nature, for He stood before God as man’s representative and was tempted as man’s substitute and surety. If Christ had a special power which it is not the privilege of man to have, Satan would have made capital of this matter.”¹³

On the subject of the expression “without sin,” Andreasen made

the following comment: "Herein lies the unfathomable mystery of the perfect life of our Saviour. For the first time human nature was led to victory over its natural tendency to sin, and because of Christ's victory over sin we too may triumph over it."¹⁴

These few examples, among others,¹⁵ have the merit of confirming the traditional teaching in a work that is generally regarded as the official expression of church doctrine.

The Ellen G. White Estate Publishes *Selected Messages*

In 1958 the Ellen G. White Estate published the two books known as *Selected Messages*. These books contain some of Ellen White's clearest and most significant passages concerning the human nature assumed by Christ. Articles on the Incarnation, the nature of Christ, and the temptations of Jesus occupy a prominent place in the first book.¹⁶ Found there is a statement that could not express the notion more clearly: "In taking upon Himself man's nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin."¹⁷ Or again: "Christ did not make believe take human nature; He did verily take it. He did in reality possess human nature. . . . He was the son of Mary; He was of the seed of David according to human descent."¹⁸

In book 2 is found the complete text of Ellen White's speech given at the close of the General Conference session in 1901, where she condemned the holy flesh movement,¹⁹ whose theological position, according to Haskell, was that Christ "took *Adam's nature before he fell*."²⁰ Ellen White describes the noisy bedlam and sensuality associated with the movement and warns of "erroneous theories and methods," and "miserable inventions of men's theories, prepared by the father of lies."²¹ The doctrine and practices of this movement were considered so dangerous for the future of the church that they were condemned by the delegates of the 1901 General Conference session, and its promoters were dismissed from the pastoral ministry.

M. L. Andreasen and His *Letters to the Churches*

The first and most vigorous reaction against the book *Questions on Doctrine* came from M. L. Andreasen. An eminent theologian and professor in various Adventist colleges in the United States, he ended

his teaching career at the theological seminary at Washington, D.C., from 1938 to 1949. Author of numerous articles and several books, he enjoyed an undisputed authority.²²

As early as 1948 Andreasen clearly affirmed his conviction on the subject of Christ's human nature in *The Book of Hebrews*.²³ The second chapter is entirely devoted to the humanity of Jesus.²⁴ His commentary on this same Epistle, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*,²⁵ follows traditional Adventist Christology. His vigorous reaction can therefore be understood when *Questions on Doctrine* promoted an interpretation of Ellen White's Christology that differed radically from traditional church teaching.

Some claimed that Andreasen was offended for not having been invited to participate in the discussions that had taken place with Walter Martin and Donald G. Barnhouse. Andreasen was then in retirement. Perhaps this was one of the reasons he was not invited. But the primary reason was probably his well-known position with regard to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Andreasen published his systematic and vigorous criticism in *Letters to the Churches*,²⁶ which was widely distributed among Adventists. A group of dissidents in France seized the opportunity to translate them and to accuse the church of apostasy in a way similar to that of the Brinsmead movement.²⁷

Andreasen began by posing the fundamental question: Was Christ "exempt from the inherited passions and pollutions that corrupt the natural descendants of Adam"?²⁸ He replied by quoting Hebrews 2:10 and 2:17: "It is *fit and right* for God to make Christ 'perfect through suffering,'" and "for this reason it is necessary for Christ *in all things* to become like His brethren."²⁹ "It is Christ's partaking of men's afflictions and weaknesses which enables Him to be the sympathizing Saviour that He is."³⁰

"If Christ was exempt from the passions of mankind, He was different from other men, none of whom is so exempt. Such teaching is tragic, and completely contrary to what Seventh-day Adventists have always taught and believed. Christ came as a man among men, asking no favors and receiving no special consideration. According to the terms of the covenant He was not to receive any help from

God not available to any other man. This was a necessary condition if His demonstration was to be of any value and His work acceptable. The least deviation from this rule would invalidate the experiment, nullify the agreement, void the covenant, and effectively destroy all hope for man.”³¹

Concerning Romans 8:3 Andreasen stated that God did not send His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh in order to *condone* sin in the flesh, but to *condemn* it.³² In support for his statements he quoted several passages from Ellen White, affirming unequivocally that “the enemy was overcome by Christ in His human nature,” “relying upon God for power.”³³ “*If He was not a partaker of our nature, He could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for Him to yield to temptations, He could not be our helper.*”³⁴

Sometimes Andreasen overstated his case. In reference to what he regarded as a dangerous heresy, he concluded: “A Saviour who has never been tempted, never has had to battle with passions, who has never ‘offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him who was able to save him from death,’ who ‘though he were a son’ never learned obedience by the things He suffered, but was ‘exempt’ from the very things that a true Saviour must experience: such a saviour is what this new theology offers us. It is not the kind of Saviour I need, nor the world. One who has never struggled with passions can have no understanding of their power, nor has he ever had the joy of overcoming them. If God extended special favors and exemptions to Christ, in that very act He disqualified Him for His work. There can be no heresy more harmful than that here discussed. It takes away the Saviour I have known and substitutes for Him a weak personality, not considered by God capable of resisting and conquering the passions which He asks men to overcome.”³⁵

“It is, of course, patent to all that no one can claim to believe the *Testimonies* and also believe in the new theology that Christ was exempt from human passions. It is one thing or the other. The denomination is now called upon to decide. To accept the teaching of *Questions on Doctrine* necessitates giving up faith in the Gift God has given this people.”³⁶

Andreasen explained to his readers how this new doctrine had come into the church. He was astonished that “it is certainly anomalous when a minister of another denomination has enough influence with our leaders to have them correct our theology, effect a change in the teaching of the denomination on a most vital doctrine of the church.”³⁷

Andreasen could not understand why a report was never published about the meetings. “We do not know, and are not supposed to know, just who wrote *Questions on Doctrine*. . . . Even at the General Conference session last year (1958), the matter was not discussed.”³⁸ Besides, he specifies: “It is a new doctrine that has never appeared in any Statement of Belief of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination, and is in direct conflict with our former statements of doctrine. It has not been ‘adopted by the General Conference in quadrennial session when accredited delegates from the whole field are present,’ as *Questions on Doctrine* says it must be done if it is to become official. See page 9. It is therefore not approved or accepted doctrine.”³⁹

In one of his last letters, Andreasen returned to the problem of hereditary passions. He continued to refute the statement found on page 383 of *Questions on Doctrine* that Christ “was exempt from the *inherited* passions and pollutions that corrupt the natural descendants of Adam.”⁴⁰ For one thing, he wrote, “this is not a quotation from the Spirit of Prophecy.”⁴¹ Also, passion and pollution “are two entirely different concepts,” and should not be placed together as they are in *Questions on Doctrine*. “Passion can generally be equated with temptation, and as such is not sin. An impure thought may come unbidden even on a sacred occasion, but it will not defile; it is not sin unless it is dwelt upon and tolerated. An unholy desire may suddenly flash to mind at Satan’s instigation; but it is not sin unless it is cherished. . . . The law of heredity applies to passions and not to pollutions. If pollution is hereditary, then Christ would have been polluted when He came to this world and could not therefore be ‘that holy thing.’ Luke 1:35. Even the children of an unbelieving husband are called holy, a statement that should be a comfort to the wives of such husbands. 1 Corinthians 7:14. As Adventists, however, we do not believe in original sin.”⁴²

Finally, in the two passages quoted in *Testimonies*,⁴³ “as proving that Christ was exempt from inherited passions,” “both of these statements mention passions, neither mentions pollutions. The word *exempt* is not found.”⁴⁴ Then Andreasen posed the question: “Does Sr. White’s statement that Christ did not *have* or *possess* passions mean that He was exempt from them? No, for not to have passions is not equivalent to being *exempt* from them. They are two entirely different concepts. . . . Sr. White does not say that Christ was *exempt* from passions. She says He does not *have* passions, did not *possess* passions, not that He was immune from them. . . . I am still puzzled how any one can make Sr. White say that Christ was exempt, when she says just the opposite, and does not use the word exempt.”⁴⁵

After having copiously quoted Ellen White, Andreasen inquired: “In view of these and many other statements, how can any say that He was *exempt*? Far from being exempt or reluctantly *submitting* to these conditions, He *accepted* them. Twice this is stated in the quotations here made. He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity, and with ‘such heredity He came to share our sorrows and temptations.’”⁴⁶

“The choice of the devout Adventist is therefore between *Questions on Doctrine* and *Desire of Ages*, between falsehood and truth. . . . The great law of heredity was decreed by God to make salvation possible, and is one of the elemental laws that has never been abrogated. Take that law away, and we have no Saviour that can be of help or example to us. Graciously Christ ‘accepted’ this law, and thus made salvation possible. To teach that Christ was *exempt* from this law negates Christianity and makes the Incarnation a pious hoax. May God deliver Seventh-day Adventists from such teaching and teachers!”⁴⁷

Andreasen’s protest was not without effect. A chorus of voices was raised almost everywhere against the book *Questions on Doctrine*. This was not only because of its teaching on Christ’s human nature, but also out of concern over other points of doctrine. It should be noted that several proposals seeking a revision of this book were sent to the General Conference Committee.

Proposals for Revision to the Book *Questions on Doctrine*

In a letter addressed to the General Conference Committee intended to support Andreasen's reaction, A. L. Hudson accused the authors of *Questions on Doctrine* of lacking intellectual honesty, because of the way the editor of *Ministry* had presented Ellen White's quotations in the September 1956 issue, reproduced in the Appendix B of *Questions on Doctrine*.

On the one hand, observed Hudson, many important passages dealing with the fallen human nature assumed by Jesus had not been quoted;⁴⁸ on the other, many had not been quoted in their entirety. For example, he mentions one quotation from the *Review and Herald* of July 28, 1874, in which the essential part had been omitted, the portion specifying that "Christ bore the sins and infirmities of the race as they existed when He came to the earth to help man. In behalf of the race, with the weaknesses of fallen man upon Him, He was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points wherewith man would be assailed."⁴⁹

Hudson therefore proposed that the delegates to the General Conference session of 1958 should authorize a revision of *Questions on Doctrine*.⁵⁰ However, as Andreasen observed, the subject was not even brought up.

At the same time, a group of church members in the Loma Linda, California, area formed a committee charged with revising the book *Questions on Doctrine*. Their report, presented to the General Conference Committee, claims that the book misrepresented "certain vital fundamentals and compromised other tenets of our faith."⁵¹ "It is evident that certain statements and teachings of the book will never be accepted by a considerable number of our people. In fact, it is our conviction that not since the time of J. H. Kellogg's pantheistic controversy of more than half a century ago has anything arisen to cause such disquietude, dissension, and disunity among our people as the publication of this book."⁵²

Despite the quotations from Ellen White published by the White Estate, and in spite of the numerous justified criticisms against the teaching contained in *Ministry* and *Questions on Doctrine*, the tenets of the new theology received an acceptance increasingly more favorable

on the part of some theologians, professors, and church pastors.

A Revealing Opinion Poll

In 1962 Robert Lee Hancock undertook a study of the teaching of the church concerning the human nature of Christ. In truth, the purpose of his study was intended to determine which position was most popular, “whether Christ took the nature of Adam as originally created perfect by God, or whether He had the ‘sinful’ flesh with its inherent weaknesses which every child normally inherits from his parents.”⁵³

Here are the conclusions reached by Hancock:

First, “from its earliest days the Seventh-day Adventist Church has taught that when God partook of humanity He took, not the perfect, sinless nature of man before the Fall, but the fallen, sinful, offending, weakened, degenerate nature of man as it existed when He came to earth to help man.

Second, “that during the 15-year period between 1940 and 1955 the words ‘sinful’ and ‘fallen’ with reference to Christ’s human nature were largely or completely eliminated from denominational published materials.

Third, “that since 1952, phrases such as ‘sinless human nature,’ ‘nature of Adam before the Fall,’ and ‘human nature undefiled’ have taken the place of the former terminology.”⁵⁴

The ultimate result of this study led Hancock to conclude: “The findings of this study warrant the conclusion that Seventh-day Adventists’ teaching regarding the human nature of Christ have changed and that these changes involve concepts and not merely semantics.”⁵⁵

Indeed, throughout the year 1970 several publications served to popularize these new tenets. They were more readily accepted within the church because they were proclaimed as representing the official position of the General Conference.

Publication of Volume 7-A of *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*

Volume 7-A of *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*⁵⁶ is a compilation of all the quotations from Ellen White previously pub-

lished at the end of each of the seven main volumes of the set. As previously noted, these comments include some of her strongest statements in favor of the fallen human nature assumed by Christ.

The new theology was introduced into this volume in three appendices that were lifted from *Questions on Doctrine*. Appendix B in particular imparts a radically nontraditional view of Christ's human nature. The subtitles added by the editor tend to contradict some of the statements by Ellen White that appear elsewhere in the volume. On the one hand Ellen White is quoted as saying that "He [Christ] took upon Himself, fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin,"⁵⁷ "the nature of Adam, the transgressor,"⁵⁸ that is to say, Adam's nature *after* the Fall. On the other hand, one subtitle indicates that Christ "took sinless human nature,"⁵⁹ that is to say, Adam's nature *before* the Fall, which is something that Ellen White never wrote.

The problem did not escape the awareness of some members of the Biblical Research Committee of the General Conference, who reacted by recommending a serious revision of Appendix B.⁶⁰

Roy Allan Anderson, *The God-Man, His Nature and Work*

In the same year, 1970, Roy Allan Anderson published *The God-Man, His Nature and Work*.⁶¹ The title page called it "A Scriptural Presentation in the Area of Christology."⁶² Anderson was at the time editor of *Ministry*, a journal for Adventist pastors. He had taken a very active part in the meetings with the evangelicals and was one of the authors of the book *Questions on Doctrine*.

In the prologue of his book, Anderson emphasized that it was necessary to build on "the unshakable Rock of the God-Man," on which "the Christian must ground his life in God."⁶³ "To better understand what Christ *has done* we need a clear definition of who Christ *is*."⁶⁴ The book explains the plan of salvation as a whole and shows with simplicity how it is realized in Jesus Christ.

As far as Christology is concerned, the book contains no controversial material in dealing with the delicate problem of Christ's human nature. In coming into the world, Anderson stated, "Christ became what we are, to make us what He is. Irenaeus expresses it

beautifully as he says: 'He was made what we are that He might make us what He is Himself.'"⁶⁵

In the chapter "The Incarnation—God's Supreme Revelation,"⁶⁶ Anderson states: "Christ's humanity and His deity are great twin truths. We must guard against making Jesus Christ merely a divine man, or thinking of Him as a human God. He is neither. He was, and is, the God-Man. In Jesus Christ is absolute humanity and absolute deity."⁶⁷ By His Incarnation "He did not cast off His divine nature, but He accepted human nature. . . . He imposed on Himself the limitations and restrictions of our human nature. And nothing human remained alien to Him."⁶⁸

Next Andersen explored the question of what distinguishes Christ's human nature from our human nature. "He 'emptied Himself' and 'took upon him the form of a servant.' He *took* it; it was not bequeathed to Him, as is our nature. When we were born, no one consulted us about our coming into the world. Moreover, our parents bequeathed to us the only nature they had, which was a fallen sinful nature. From all the generations of the past we inherited tendencies to sin. We were truly 'shapen in iniquity.' But from His first inbreathing our Lord was sinless. He was in the likeness of sinful flesh, but He was sinless in both His nature and His life."⁶⁹

We find here the basic concept of the new Christology. On the one hand Anderson affirms "the absolute humanity" of Christ, while on the other he rejects the very essence of human nature in a fallen state, subservient to the power of sin. The fact that the Lord "was sinless . . . in His life" no one disputes. But how does this harmonize with Paul's statement that it was "in the likeness of sinful flesh"?

Anderson was apparently reluctant to be overly polemical in a book intended for the general public.⁷⁰ Such is not the case of the monumental work by LeRoy E. Froom: *Movement of Destiny*. Published the same year as volume 7-A of *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* and Anderson's book *The God-Man, His Nature and Work*, Froom's work was instrumental in fostering the tenets of the new theology, and deserves very special attention.

LeRoy Edwin Froom Confirms the New Christology

By the time LeRoy Edwin Froom published *Movement of Destiny* in 1970, he had secured undisputed recognition as a researcher, scholar, and historian. His four-volume *Prophetic Faith of Our Fathers* and two-volume *Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers* had contributed greatly to his reputation.⁷¹ It is not surprising that his *Movement of Destiny* would receive official endorsement.

The project had approval from the highest levels of the church. Froom himself stated that “some sixty of the most competent denominational scholars, of a dozen specialties,” had approved the contents.⁷²

In *Movement of Destiny* Froom presented the principal Adventist doctrines in the setting of their historical development. It is evident that the topic of the person and work of Christ was very close to his heart. Above all, he wanted to reinstate the truth about Christ’s human nature, which, according to him, a “minority” had falsely represented as the Adventist position. “As a result,” Froom claimed, “Adventists had long been censured by theologians not of our faith for tolerating *this erroneous minority position*.”⁷³

Froom’s main purpose was “changing the impaired image of Adventism.”⁷⁴ First, by means of the discussions with evangelical representatives; then, through the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*.⁷⁵ Froom concluded that “above all, its clear declarations, in *Questions on Doctrine*, on the eternal preexistence and complete deity of Christ, *His sinless nature* and life during the Incarnation, and the transcendent act of atonement consummated on the cross, are determining factors, many non-Adventist scholars frankly tell us, that have caused us to be recognized as truly Christian believers.”

On the strength of typical expressions taken from statements by Ellen White, Froom considered that he was in a position to make an “amazing presentation of Christ’s deity and humanity.”⁷⁷ The demonstration was made in 10 points, including the following tendentious subtitles: Christ “took sinless nature of Adam before fall”; “assumed ‘liabilities’ of ‘human nature’”; “tempted in all points or principles”; “bore imputed sin and guilt of world”; “without ‘passions’ of fallen nature.”⁷⁸

As a matter of fact, Froom was only repeating the concepts con-

tained in the *Ministry* of September 1956 and in the book *Questions on Doctrine*. But his aim consisted mainly in placing them in their historical setting,⁷⁹ by recalling the circumstances that allowed him to correct what he considered the “erroneous” image of Adventism.

The book was quite polemical. Upon the release of *Movement of Destiny*, one of Froom’s critics wrote: “The reader must always be on the alert when studying Froom, asking himself whether he has been given a full account, or whether important aspects have been neglected or misrepresented.”⁸⁰

This is a harsh judgment, but the same is true in the way Froom dealt with the history of the doctrine of the Incarnation. To demonstrate that Jesus assumed a sinless nature similar to that of Adam before the Fall, he purposely omitted everything contrary to his thesis. References were sometimes presented out of context or under titles that distorted the meaning of the statements made by the author.

We do not have space to examine all the problems contained in *Movement of Destiny*. A few details must suffice. First, why did Froom systematically ignore the statements clearly in favor of Christ having assumed a sinful human nature? The historian’s mission should be to report the facts as objectively as possible. Why then did he discard all of the unambiguous “sinful nature” statements by Ellen White?

Other omissions are just as inexplicable on the part of a historian who claims to retrace the development of a crucial doctrine such as justification by faith in the context of the pioneers who proclaimed it. Froom hardly mentioned A. T. Jones, who was the chief exponent of this doctrine, except to recall that he finally apostatized. The “holy flesh” movement was passed over in complete silence—with good reason, of course, for its supporters taught that Christ had holy flesh, and this led to antics which brought about their condemnation by Ellen White and the delegates of the 1901 session of the General Conference.

Out of all those who had written in the past on the person and work of Jesus, Prescott was the only one, according to Froom, who had made a noteworthy contribution.⁸¹ His book *The Doctrine of Christ*, published in 1920, was, according to Froom, the first to place “the centrality of Christ in all His ‘fullness’ as the essence of the gospel, and righteousness by faith in Him as the sole hope of man.”⁸²

Froom considered the book so important that he summarized the principal chapters.

Although Prescott devoted three lessons to the doctrine of the Incarnation, Froom mentioned not a word concerning his teaching on Christ's human nature, because it was in opposition to Froom's own teaching. Likewise, Froom passed over in silence Prescott's sermon "The Word Made Flesh," given in Australia and widely published in official church periodicals,⁸³ even though Ellen White had enthusiastically approved Prescott's explanations.⁸⁴

When at several points Froom could no longer ignore certain statements by Waggoner and Ellen White in opposition to his own thesis, he interpreted them "vicariously."⁸⁵ Froom introduced into the original the word "vicariously," as though it were from Waggoner's own pen. Having quoted the expression "he was made sin" from 2 Corinthians 5:21, Waggoner concluded: "Sinless, yet not only counted as a sinner, but actually taking upon Himself sinful nature."⁸⁶ Froom repeated the statement by writing: "More than that, He was actually 'made'—vicariously—to '*be sin for us,*' that we '*might be made the righteousness of God in Him*' (2 Cor. 5:21)."⁸⁷

In spite of its many faults, this book exerted considerable influence. Froom enjoyed a high level of authority among certain church leaders, many of whom did not understand the traditional teaching of the church.⁸⁸ At any rate, *Movement of Destiny* touched off an awakening and a new round of reactions on the part of several official organizations of the church, as well as on the part of individuals whose competence was unquestioned.

References and Notes

¹ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 1, p. 1085 (*Review and Herald*, Feb. 24, 1874).

² *Ibid.*, vol. 4, p. 1147 (*Youth' Instructor*, Dec. 20, 1900).

³ *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 1079 (*Review and Herald*, Aug. 4, 1974).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1081 (*Review and Herald*, July 28, 1874).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1124 (Ellen G. White letter 106, 1896).

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1128 (Ellen G. White letter 8, 1895).

⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. 6, p. 1074 (Ellen G. White manuscript 76, 1903).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 562 (the comment by A. G. Maxwell, not Ellen G. White).

⁹ *Ibid.*, vol. 7, p. 904 (Ellen G. White manuscript 67, 1898).

- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 926 (Ellen G. White manuscript 141, 1901).
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 929 (Ellen G. White manuscript 1, 1892).
- ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 930 (*Review and Herald*, April 1, 1875).
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 930 (Ellen G. White manuscript 1, 1892).
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 426.
- ¹⁵ Bruno W. Steinweg has reported the same quotations in his 1986 paper, "The Doctrine of the Human Nature of Christ Among Adventists Since 1950," pp. 5-7.
- ¹⁶ E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 285-339. See our chapter 2, "The First Adventist Testimonies."
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 256.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 247.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, book 2, pp. 31-39. See our chapter 7, "The Holy Flesh Movement."
- ²⁰ S. N. Haskell letter to Ellen G. White, September 1900. Quoted in William H. Grotheer, *An Interpretive History of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, p. 50.
- ²¹ Ellen G. White letter 132, 1900 (*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 37).
- ²² See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, p. 43. Among M. L. Andreasen's books we would mention in particular: *The Sanctuary Service*; *The Book of Hebrews*; *A Faith to Live By*; *What Can a Man Believe*; *Saints and Sinners*.
- ²³ Milian L. Andreasen, *The Book of Hebrews* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1948).
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-109.
- ²⁵ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 387-494.
- ²⁶ Milian L. Andreasen, *Letters to the Churches* (Conway, Mo.: Gems of Truth, n.d.).
- ²⁷ ———, *Lettres aux eglises* (Roiffieux, Ardeche, France: Association Culturelle Laïque Adventiste, n.d.).
- ²⁸ ———, *Letters to the Churches*, p. 4.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*
- ³² *Ibid.*, p. 4.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, p. 5. E. G. White, in *Youth's Instructor*, Apr. 25, 1901.
- ³⁴ Andreasen, *Letters to the Churches*, p. 5. White, *Review and Herald*, Feb. 18, 1890.
- ³⁵ Andreasen, *Letters to the Churches*, pp. 5, 6.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 13.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 56.
- ⁴³ E. G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 202, 509.
- ⁴⁴ Andreasen, *Letters to the Churches*, pp. 53, 54.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 55.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 55, 56.
- ⁴⁸ A. L. Hudson refers to E. G. White manuscript 21, 1895; manuscript 141, 1901; letter 121, 1897; manuscript 1, 1892.
- ⁴⁹ E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 267, 268.
- ⁵⁰ This letter of A. L. Hudson's is reported by Steinweg, pp. 7, 8.
- ⁵¹ Details reported by William H. Grotheer.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 81.

⁵³ Robert Lee Hancock, "The Humanity of Christ" (term paper presented to the Department of Church History, Andrews University, July 1962). See Grotheer, pp. 81, 82.

⁵⁴ Hancock, pp. 26, 27. See Grotheer, p. 82.

⁵⁵ Hancock, p. 27.

⁵⁶ Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1970.

⁵⁷ *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 7-A, p. 157 (*Youth's Instructor*, Dec. 20, 1900).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 370 (Ellen G. White manuscript 141, 1901).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 446, subtitle III.

⁶⁰ See our chapter 12.

⁶¹ Roy Allan Anderson, *The God-Man, His Nature and Work* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn. 1970).

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-48.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Roy Allan Anderson's book *The God-Man, His Nature and Work*, was derived from a series of his public meetings.

⁷¹ See *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia*, p. 484.

⁷² LeRoy Edwin Froom to William H. Grotheer, Apr. 17, 1971. See Grotheer, p. 83.

⁷³ Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, p. 428. (Italics supplied.)

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 465-475.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 476-492.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 492. (Italics supplied.)

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 495.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 495-499.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 485, 486.

⁸⁰ Ingemar Linden, "Apologetics as History," *Spectrum*, Autumn 1971.

⁸¹ Froom, p. 380.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 380, 381.

⁸³ See our chapter 6, devoted to Prescott's Christology.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Ellet J. Waggoner, *Christ and His Righteousness*, pp. 27, 28.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Froom, p. 197.

⁸⁸ It was my pleasure to retrace the history of Adventist Christology in the setting of Consultation IV of the Ellen G. White Estate, at Washington in January 1987. It is obvious that some in the distinguished audience were not aware of the teaching of the pioneers. One of them remarked at the close of the presentation: "If this is so, we must change our position on this issue."

REACTIONS TO THE NEW CHRISTOLOGY (1970-1979)

The influence of the new theology was growing. Although the supporters of traditional Christology were at first a bit stunned by the swiftness of the change, they eventually began to react more vigorously, mostly through the official channels of church media. Initially they made themselves heard in articles placed in the *Review and Herald*; then through the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference level; later by means of the Sabbath school lessons, and several books. Following the publication of *Movement of Destiny*, the year 1970 marked the beginning of an awakening interest in the historical teachings of the pioneers of the church.

The *Review and Herald* Reacts

After the death of F. D. Nichol in 1966, Kenneth H. Wood, his associate, became chief editor of the *Review and Herald*. Under his leadership, from 1966 to 1982, the *Review* never stopped looking back at the historical teaching. And as president of the Ellen G. White Estate and chair of its Board of Trustees since 1980, Wood has done all he can to encourage the publication of articles bolstering the traditional position.

To this end, Wood called in two associate editors: Thomas A. Davis in 1970, and Herbert E. Douglass in 1971. Both revealed themselves to be strong defenders of traditional Adventist Christology. By way of articles, books, and occasional Sabbath school lessons they systematically opposed the teaching found in

Questions on Doctrine and Movement of Destiny.

Even before he was called to the *Review*, Thomas A. Davis had published a book for daily meditations in 1966 that upheld the historical position. "The mighty Creator," he wrote, "who had placed that atom of a world spinning in space, Himself became a partaker of the flesh and blood of sinful man, and made His home upon that tiny planet He had created. Amazing condescension! Had He taken upon Himself the form of sinless Adam he would have made an infinite sacrifice. But He went far beyond that when He was made in the fashion of man degraded through thousands of years of sin."¹ In 1971 Davis repeated his convictions in his book *Romans for the Every-day Man*.²

Herbert E. Douglass also took a strong stand against the new tenets of Adventism. He was known as a seasoned theologian and respected Bible teacher, having served in several colleges of the United States. From 1967 to 1970 he served as president of Atlantic Union College. Called upon to join the staff of the *Review and Herald* as an associate editor, he became known as one of the most ardent defenders of the historical postlapsarian position.³

Upon arriving at the *Review*, he published a series of articles and editorials setting forth an aspect of the problem dear to his heart: "On that first Christmas," he wrote, "the glad-hearted angels knew that the dramatic moment had arrived. Their beloved Lord had personally entered the fray. . . . He would prove that what He has asked fallen man to do would be done."⁴

In the second editorial Douglass explained *why* Christ had to take on Himself man's fallen nature. "All other steps in the plan of salvation, including the resurrection of the faithful during Old Testament times, depended absolutely upon the success Jesus would have as a fellow participant in the arena of temptation. For if Christ, before the watching universe, did not conquer under the same conditions all men must live with, then no man can hope to conquer."⁵

In the last article of the series Douglass showed that man can conquer temptation in the example of Jesus. "As man's substitute He proved that man could live without sinning. 'We also are to overcome as Christ overcame' (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 389). Jesus employed no advantages that are not available to every human being.

His faith alone constitutes the secret of His triumph over sin. 'Christ's overcoming and obedience is that of a human being. . . . When we give to His human nature a power that is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity' (*Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 7, p. 929)."⁶

One of the concepts Douglass developed in his editorials was particularly dear to his heart. It had to do with the last generation, living at Christ's return. "The faith of Jesus produces the character of Jesus; such is the goal of all those who wish to be a part of that remarkable demonstration of Christlike living by the last generation of Adventists."⁷ "The last generation of those who 'keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus' will dissolve forever all lingering doubts as to whether man's will joined to God's power can throw back all temptations to self-serving and sin."⁸

For several years, between 1971 and 1974, Douglass published a Christmas editorial that drew attention to Christ's fallen human nature, and the reason for His taking humanity upon Himself.⁹ When he was asked why he had written these editorials, Douglass replied: "Obviously it became a rallying point, or flag, for many who thought they would never again see the truth in print. . . . I simply wanted to give warm support to a point of view that had been very prominent in the history of our church and was still prominent in the lives and thinking of many of the General Conference brethren with whom I fellowshiped from day to day."¹⁰

Reaction of the Biblical Research Institute

Shortly after the appearance of volume 7-A of *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* in 1970, the members of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute called for a revision of one of the appendices. This was done in a special supplement of *Ministry* in February 1972,¹¹ with the following introduction:

"With the publication of *Questions on Doctrine* . . . considerable interest was stirred concerning the nature of Christ during the Incarnation, and the relationship of that nature to the nature of man, especially in man's battle with temptation and sin.

“As study followed the publication of *Questions on Doctrine*, the suggestion was made that the Appendix B, entitled ‘Christ’s Nature During the Incarnation,’ could be made more helpful if the elements of possible interpretation—emphasis by italicization, interpretation by title, etc.—could be minimized, so that the statements would stand before the reader in their own strength, speaking to his mind.

“The material in its present form was considered by the Biblical Research Committee of the General Conference and was approved as a more helpful form for future presentation. . . . Readers of this material are encouraged to consider the balance in these statements between the divinity and the humanity of Christ, and the dangers inherent in making Him too exclusively divine or too completely human. The element of mystery in the Incarnation calls for constant recognition.”¹²

The Biblical Research Institute eliminated the italics, reorganized the text itself, and deleted some quotations. More important, it rewrote many of the titles and subtitles to make them less theologically tendentious. Thus, for example, Title III, which says Christ “took sinless human nature,”¹³ was replaced by one that is more in agreement with the content of the quotations: “In taking human nature Christ did not participate in its sin or propensity to evil.”¹⁴ Thus, without entering into polemics with the authors of Appendix B, the members of the Bible Research Institute presented a neutral text, leaving the readers to draw their own conclusions.

In his report made public, Gordon Hyde, then director of the Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference, noted, with regret, the growing influence of the new Christology. “It is generally known,” he wrote, “that not all were happy with the emphasis given in *Questions on Doctrine*, and indeed, that one or two Bible students among us, as well as leaders of some dissenting groups, took a negative attitude toward the emphasis given and argued strongly for the postlapsarian position. In general, however, the position of *Questions on Doctrine* seemed to prevail and was held by the leadership of the church to be a sound position. . . . But in the last three or four years, there has been something of a revival of the issues both by certain of the editors of the *Review* in their editorials and in some publications of dissenting groups.”¹⁵

Herbert E. Douglass Reacts in the Sabbath School Lessons

About the time Herbert Douglass published his editorials in the *Review and Herald*, he was asked to prepare the Sabbath school lessons on “Christ Our Righteousness” for the first quarter in 1974.¹⁶

The problem of the human nature of Jesus is dealt with under the title “The Righteous Jesus.”¹⁷ The basic verse is Romans 8:3, and the introduction of the topic shares this Ellen White quotation: “Christ bore the sins and infirmities of the race as they existed when He came to the earth to help man. In behalf of the race, with the weaknesses of fallen man upon Him, He was to stand the temptations of Satan upon all points wherewith man would be assailed.”¹⁸

Having developed the theme of the divinity of Jesus in the first two parts of the lesson, Douglass proceeded with His humanity in the last four sections, under the following titles: “Jesus Was Man” (Phil. 2:5-7); “Mutual Understanding” (Heb. 2:17); “Jesus Was Tempted” (Heb. 4:15; 12:3, 4); “A Sinless Life” (Rom. 8:3; John 16:33). The comments for each text were drawn mostly from Ellen White. Considering that the new interpretation was supposedly based on statements by Ellen White, it was appropriate to refute that interpretation by relying on her writings. Hence, this classic quotation in connection with Philippians 2:5-7 and John 1:14: “Christ did not make believe take human nature; He did really take it . . . (Heb. 2:14). He was the son of Mary; He was of the seed of David according to human descent. He is declared to be a man, even the Man Christ Jesus.”¹⁹ Yet another: “For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth; and Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation.”²⁰

Jesus was sinless not because He had sinless flesh, but because He lived without sinning in a “flesh in the likeness of sin.” So Douglass concluded that Jesus had demonstrated that it was possible “to live without sin, in obedience to the law of heaven, by whosoever casts himself entirely on the hands of God.”²¹

As we shall see again later, Douglass is particular about emphasizing the *reason* Jesus came in sinful flesh. For him there existed a

relationship of cause and effect between Christology and soteriology. Indeed, he felt this was precisely what this whole controversy was about.

In an attempt to resolve the differences on the subject of justification by faith, the leaders of the General Conference felt that a special committee should be appointed. Obviously this committee could not consider the problem of justification by faith without also considering Christ's human nature. We will survey the reports of this committee to glean from them their conclusions concerning Christology.

Christology of the Justification by Faith Committee

This committee was specifically appointed to examine a manuscript of Robert J. Wieland and Donald K. Short. For this reason it was first known as "The Wieland and Short Manuscript Review Committee."²² As early as 1950 these two missionaries, upon their return from Africa, were first to give warning to the General Conference about new interpretations concerning the person and work of Christ that were threatening the church. Subsequently they were asked to present their concerns in writing, which they did in the form of a typescript handbook entitled *1888 Re-Examined*.²³

To facilitate the work of the committee, three commissions were requested to gather together certain needed documents. The committee itself met October 25, 1974, and again a second time from February 17 to 19, 1975. A third and final meeting from April 23 to 30, 1976, at Palmdale, California, included a substantial delegation from Australia.

It is interesting to note how the report of the February 17, 1975, meeting sums up the agreement reached with brethren Wieland and Short. First, they recognized the unique contribution of Jones and Waggoner in their message of justification by faith and the relationship that existed between the *human nature of Jesus* and justification by faith. The committee concluded, however, that Ellen White had not approved every one of the statements made by Jones and Waggoner.²⁴ Furthermore, it refused to enter into controversy on the subject of Christ's human nature.

In essence, these points were developed in the report of the

Palmdale committee on justification by faith.²⁵ Meanwhile some Adventist theologians from Australia had challenged the traditional interpretation of justification by faith by affirming that according to the Bible, the expression meant justification only, without including sanctification. A delegation of 19 leaders of the Australian church, including Desmond Ford and Alwyn Salom, was invited to discuss the matter at the Palmdale conference. Both men had the opportunity to present their points of view, on both justification by faith and Christ's human nature. It was obvious that no one doubted the direct relationship between the two.

In the section dealing with Christ's humanity, the report summed up the conclusions of the committee as follows:

"1. That Christ was, and still is, the God-man—the union of true Deity and true humanity.

"2. That Christ experienced the total range of temptation at the risk of failure and eternal loss.

"3. That Christ overcame temptation, appropriating only those provisions God makes available to the human family.

"4. That Christ lived in perfect obedience to God's commandments and was sinless.

"5. That by His life and atoning death Christ made it possible for sinners to be justified by faith and therefore accounted righteous in God's sight.

"6. That through faith in Christ's redemptive act, not only a person's standing before God may be changed, but his character also, as he grows in grace and gains victory over hereditary as well as cultivated tendencies to evil. This experience of justification and sanctification continues until glorification."²⁶

The report quotes the Ellen White statements most favorable to the traditional interpretation, emphasizing both Christ's participation in man's fallen nature, and His sinless life. But obviously the participants at this conference were not unanimous in the interpretations of these statements. In fact as many supporters of the postlapsarian position were present as of the prelapsarian. So the conference report takes no stand on this issue but ends with an appeal for unity and an encouragement to pursue this study in a spirit of tolerance from both sides.

In effect, it was no longer a matter of deciding which of the two interpretations was correct but merely of recognizing that two different points of view existed. These deviations on such fundamental doctrines as justification by faith and Christ's human nature were considered by some as evidence of an acute theological crisis at the heart of the Adventist Church. Geoffrey J. Paxton's *The Shaking of Adventism* represents clearly the opinion of those who followed the discussions of the Palmdale conference from the outside.²⁷

As seen from inside, Arthur Leroy Moore, an Adventist theologian, reached the same conclusion in his doctoral thesis, published in 1980 under the title of *The Theology Crisis*.²⁸ Moore refutes systematically the new interpretations of the "Reformists"—as he called them—on justification by faith and Christ's human nature on the strength of Ford's presentations at the Palmdale conference.²⁹

Ford's Papers at the Palmdale Conference

Among the Australian delegates at the Palmdale conference in April 1976 was an influential theologian, Desmond Ford, who taught at the Adventist College of Avondale, in Australia.

For some years Ford had propagated his ideas on the doctrine of justification by faith, declaring that the church had nullified this doctrine by rejecting the doctrine of original sin. "This . . . has given rise to three related heresies," he writes, "(a) that gospel includes sanctification as well as justification; (b) that the Christ took the fallen nature of Adam; and (c) that a 'final generation' must develop perfect characters before Christ's return."³⁰

As these ideas had been widely spread throughout the United States, it was desirable that Ford should present them to the Committee of Justification by Faith, in order to arrive at an official statement if possible. So Ford was given the opportunity of presenting three papers at the Palmdale conference. The first was "The Scope and Limits of the Pauline Expression 'Righteousness by Faith'"; the second, "The Relationship Between the Incarnation and Righteousness by Faith"; and the third, "Ellen G. White and Righteousness by Faith."³¹

Ford took a position similar to that found in *Questions on Doctrine*,³²

but his position was more precisely defined: "Christ took on Adam's sinlessness but not his strength. He took on our weakness but not our sinfulness. Like Adam, He could have sinned but did not."³³

From this Christology Ford developed his doctrine of justification by faith in the sense of a purely legal transaction, limited to imputed righteousness. "To put it yet in another way," he wrote, "justification, and not sanctification, is the Righteousness by Faith of the New Testament, and such righteousness is the gift of the incarnate, crucified, and resurrected Lord."³⁴

This teaching of a purely legal righteousness eventually led Ford and his followers to a form of evangelical Adventism,³⁵ which tended to downplay the importance of obedience as a condition of salvation, offered salvation without fear of a judgment to come, and denied all prophetic significance of the 1844 event.³⁶ These extreme conclusions are in logical harmony with their assumptions, but they are in radical opposition to traditional Adventist Christology and to the message of justification by faith proclaimed in 1888. It is not surprising that the reaction to these tenets was swift.

Herbert E. Douglass Reaffirms the Traditional Christology

Following the printing of his first Sabbath school lesson for the first quarter of 1974, Douglass was requested to prepare a second manuscript for the second quarter of 1977. He gave it the title "Jesus, the Model Man." This was a logical sequel to the preceding lessons on "The Righteous Jesus."

Such manuscripts are always submitted for examination to a worldwide committee responsible for maintaining doctrinal content in harmony with the tenets of the church. This second manuscript did encounter some opposition, but the General Conference Sabbath School Department approved the publication of the manuscript despite the criticisms.³⁷

The dominant theme of these lessons can be summed by this Ellen White statement quoted in the general introduction: "We are to look to the man Christ Jesus, who is complete in the perfection of righteousness and holiness. He is the author and finisher of our faith. He is the pattern man. His experience is the measure of the ex-

perience that we are to gain. His character is our model. . . . As we look to Him and think of Him, He will be formed within.”³⁸

Faithful to the basic concept of the traditional Adventist Christology, Douglass repeated that “Jesus, the Carpenter of Nazareth, came to this earth accepting ‘the results of the working of the great law of heredity.’ He was ‘subject to the weakness of humanity . . . to fight the battle as every child of humanity must fight it, at the risk of failure and eternal loss.’”³⁹ Relying constantly on Ellen White’s teaching, Douglass took pleasure in restating that Christ’s victory over sin could also be ours. “As one of us He was to give an example of obedience. . . . He endured every trial to which we are subject. And He exercised in His own behalf no power that is not freely offered to us. . . . His life testifies that it is possible for us also to obey the law of God.”⁴⁰

“If God had come to earth and only appeared to be a man, His performance would not have answered Satan’s charges; the issue was not what God could do. The issue was whether man could keep the law and resist sin.”⁴¹ In support of his conviction he quoted Ellen White’s statement that “Christ’s overcoming and obedience is that of a true human being. In our conclusions, we make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of the Lord. When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan we destroy the completeness of His humanity.”⁴²

In addition to the Sabbath school lessons, Douglass also published a sort of commentary on the different lessons in collaboration with Leo Van Dolson: *Jesus—The Benchmark of Humanity*.⁴³ For Douglass, Jesus was not only “the Model Man,” but also “the benchmark of humanity”—in other words, the measure of what we could become by the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

Douglass had already developed this theme in a chapter of the book *Perfection, the Impossible Possibility*, published in 1975.⁴⁴ Under the title “The Showcase of God’s Grace,” Douglass reaffirmed the teaching of the pioneers and of Ellen White, whose writings he quoted profusely. He was pleased also to recognize leading theologians such as Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, who, like him, had

shown that the participation of Jesus in a state of fallen human nature was not only a Christological truth, but a soteriological reality of great importance. For Douglass, Christian perfection is possible only to the extent of one's acknowledgment that Jesus Christ Himself participated in the nature of sinful man.

Douglass is explicit: "In no way would Ellen White play down the triumph of Jesus and lend any support to the great Christian heresy that our Lord's human nature was as Adam's before his fall—unencumbered with the liabilities and degeneracy of sin."⁴⁵

Of course, Douglass was not alone in recalling what was the foundation of Adventist Christology since the beginning of the movement. Other voices were also heard,⁴⁶ such as that of Kenneth H. Wood, editor in chief of the general periodical of the church, the *Review and Herald*.

Kenneth H. Wood Confirms the Traditional Christology

Kenneth H. Wood, currently the president of the Ellen G. White Estate, was the editor of the *Review and Herald* from 1966 to 1982. He did not express his views directly on the problem of Christ's human nature until 1977, when he published three editorials in parallel with the Sabbath school lessons of the second quarter, dealing with "Jesus, the Model Man."

The first appeared on May 5, 1977, timed to coincide with the study of the lessons prepared by Herbert Douglass. Wood considered these lessons to "have exceptional value." "These Sabbath school lessons emphasize that Jesus met fully every qualification necessary for the task of saving lost mankind. Except for His absolute sinlessness, Jesus identified completely with the human race (see Ellen G. White letter 17, 1878)."⁴⁷

Alas, Wood observed, "not all Christians—even Seventh-day Adventists—agree on the interpretation of these and other inspired statements."⁴⁸ This was demonstrated at the Palmdale conference where, according to the report, the participants were divided between those who held for a nature of sinful humanity inherited by Christ, and those who believed His nature to have been that of sinless humanity.⁴⁹

Wood believed that Adventists had been commissioned by God

to exalt Christ. "Are they doing this? Not as fully as they should. And perhaps one reason is that for a number of years too many members and ministers have feared to discuss the humanity of Christ lest they appear irreverent and seem to make Christ 'altogether human' (which He was not; He also was divine). They have been disturbed when some church members and leaders have preached the Christ of historic Adventism, the Christ who lived as we must live, who was tempted as we are tempted, who overcame as we must overcome, and who has promised to live in us by His Holy Spirit (uniting our human nature with His divine nature)." ⁵⁰

Wood expressed his satisfaction: "Thus we rejoice that the General Conference Sabbath School Department, through the quarter's lessons, is leading the world to gaze long and hard at Jesus. We believe that as a result of these lessons the life and ministry of Jesus will have greater relevance for every believer, and that a climate of openness has been created in which study can be given to aspects of the Incarnation that must be understood thoroughly before the third angel's message can swell into the loud cry." ⁵¹

In the months following these editorials, Edward Heppenstall's book *The Man Who Is God* was published, subtitled "A Study of the Person and Nature of Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man." ⁵² We will elaborate on its contents later, but here we note that the two editorials from the pen of Kenneth Wood at the end of the year bear a relationship to the publication of this book.

In response to Heppenstall's arguments, Wood reaffirmed his position in a December 22, 1977, editorial entitled "The Gift Supreme." Wood first expressed his gratitude to God for this gift that surpasses all understanding. "The mind-boggling aspect of the Bethlehem story is that the infinite God would come to this world and join the human race." ⁵³

"But even more amazing than the fact that God the Son came to dwell with humanity, is the truth that He came to dwell with sinful humanity! It would have been an almost infinite humiliation for the Son of God to take man's nature, even when Adam stood in his innocence in Eden. But Jesus accepted humanity when the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin. Like every child of

Adam He accepted the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 49).”⁵⁴

In a second editorial Wood explained how Jesus could live without sinning while in a sinful human flesh. Certainly, he remarked, it “challenges both faith and reason, but we dare not reject truth merely because we cannot understand or explain it.”⁵⁵ Other aspects of the Incarnation are also a mystery, yet we accept them—such as “how a divine nature and a human nature could be blended into one Person.”⁵⁶

Wood warned against two dangerous conclusions that some draw from the statement that Christ took a sinful nature. First, “that this made Christ only human, not divine.” Second, “that He was thereby tainted with sin, or was inclined toward it.”⁵⁷ Wood quoted Ellen White against this view: “‘Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ, or that He in any way yielded to temptation’ (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1128).”⁵⁸

In fact, Wood stated, “(1) Taking man’s sinful nature did not defile or taint Christ. (2) Jesus was totally loyal to His Father and hostile to rebellion, which is the very essence of sin.”⁵⁹

Wood justified the first statement with the following explanation: “Note what happened when Christ touched lepers. Was He defiled by touching them? . . . No, instead, the lepers were cleansed.” “When Deity touches humanity, Deity is not defiled; instead, humanity is blessed, healed, and purified.” Christ was born of the Spirit, and when He was united to sinful human nature, “by the fact of His taking it, purged [it] from all its inherent depravity.”⁶⁰

As to the second statement, Wood explained that no trace of rebellion was found in Jesus. “He always was in complete harmony with His Father’s will and law. . . . Jesus said of Himself: ‘The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me’ (John 14:30); also, ‘I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me’ (chap. 5:30). Jesus had a will of His own—as do all human be-

ings—but it was surrendered to His Father—as should be the will of all who are born of the Spirit.”⁶¹

When it is written that Jesus was tempted in all points like us without committing sin (Heb. 4:15), whom does the “us” describe, asks Wood? “He was not referring to pagans but to the people of God. . . . Perhaps he was referring primarily to the people born of the Spirit (cf. John 3:3-8), people who are no longer carnally minded and ‘in the flesh,’ but people who are ‘spiritually minded’ and ‘in the spirit’ (see Rom. 8:4-9).”⁶² Accordingly, “those who are born of the Spirit can, through the power of Christ, resist successfully every temptation, and be victorious in their fight against the enemy of their souls.”⁶³

By living victoriously in a fallen human nature, “Jesus provided an example of what His followers may achieve in their battle with sin.”⁶⁴ In closing, Wood exclaimed: “What a wonderful God we serve. What a wonderful Saviour we have! What wonderful power is available to enable us to live a life of victory!”⁶⁵

The Christology of Edward Heppenstall

Edward Heppenstall was a prominent professor of Christian philosophy for whom theology was not truly useful unless it led to a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Born in England, he taught in several American colleges, then at the SDA Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., from 1955. At Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, he was in charge of systematic theology and Christian philosophy. In 1967 he accepted a call to Loma Linda University, in California, to teach in the Department of Religion until his retirement in 1970.⁶⁶

Through the years Heppenstall was a faithful contributor to the various Adventist periodicals, in particular the *Ministry*, *Signs of the Times*, and *These Times*. The commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* is from his pen. Several of his books, written during his retirement, are authoritative: *Our High Priest* (1972), *Salvation Unlimited* (1974), *In Touch With God* (1975), *The Man Who Is God* (1977), all published in Washington, D.C., by the Review and Herald Publishing Association.

As far as our subject is concerned, Heppenstall detailed his Christology in his book *The Man Who Is God*. It is perhaps the most systematic approach by an Adventist theologian on “the person and nature of Jesus, Son of God and Son of man” (the subtitle of the book). All aspects of Christology are treated: Christ in human history, the Incarnation, the birth of Jesus, the kenosis doctrine, the center of Christ’s consciousness, Christ and sin, the sinlessness of Christ, the temptation of Christ, the uniqueness of Christ.

For Heppenstall, the Incarnation constitutes the greatest miracle of all time and eternity. It is truly the central fact of Christianity. “If one does not believe in the Incarnation, then it is impossible to understand what the Christian faith stands for,”⁶⁷ because, “the substance of our faith lies in what Christ was and what He did, and not merely in what He taught.”⁶⁸ “This union of the divine and the human resulted in two natures in one person, Jesus Christ. Hence the term used of Jesus—the God-man.”⁶⁹ Having emphasized the miraculous birth of Jesus, Heppenstall continued to affirm both the perfect divinity of Christ and His perfect humanity: fully God and fully man.

Heppenstall believed that Christ’s humanity was not Adam’s sinless humanity before the Fall. “Christ came in the humble form of a servant at His incarnation, depicting servitude, subjection, subordination. He took a weakened human nature, not the perfect nature Adam had before he sinned. He did not come to earth as a new human being newly created in power and splendor. . . . Instead of commanding and ruling in power and majesty, occupying a place of honor and preeminence among men, He humbled Himself. He trod the path of humiliation, which culminated in His death upon the cross.”⁷⁰

While Heppenstall differed from those who affirm that Jesus took Adam’s human nature *before the Fall*, he also differed from those who attribute to Jesus Adam’s nature *after the Fall*. He saw a difference between having a sinful nature and a nature that carried only the results of sin. Obviously, “if the transmission of sin is by natural propagation, then Jesus must have inherited from Mary what we all inherit from our parents, unless we favor some form of immaculate-conception doctrine.”⁷¹

For Heppenstall sin was not something genetic. What human

beings inherited from Adam by birth was the state of sin that separates from God, that is, "original sin." "Sin is a spiritual thing caused by the alienation of the whole person from God. We cannot apply this alienated condition to Christ. He was not born as we are, separate from God. He was God Himself. He could inherit from Mary only what could be transmitted genetically. This means He inherited the weakened physical constitution, the results of sin upon the body, that we all inherit. As concerning all other men, they are born without God. All men need regeneration. Christ did not. Here lies the great difference between Christ and ourselves."⁷²

Because Heppenstall separated original sin from the genetic process, he could affirm that Christ did not have a sinful nature like the rest of mankind. Besides, he remarked, "This scripture [Rom. 8:3] does not say that God sent His Son 'in sinful flesh' but only 'in the likeness' of it. . . . If Christ had been born exactly as we are, Paul would not have written 'in the likeness' but 'in sinful flesh.' Paul is very careful to make clear the sinlessness of Christ's nature."⁷³ "Christ was not born free from physical deterioration. He inherited all this from Mary. . . . He was subject physically to the decline of the race; but since sin is not transmitted genetically, but as a result of man's separation from God, Christ was born without sin."⁷⁴

Dealing with the problem of temptation, Heppenstall considered that "the possibility of being tempted is the same for a sinless as for a sinful person. Adam was tempted as a sinless person. He faced temptation in the full strength of a perfect physical and mental system. But Christ did not become flesh in the perfect state in which Adam was created. For Christ, the strength of temptation was vastly increased by virtue of His inheriting a physical constitution weakened by 4,000 years of increasing degeneracy in the race. The possibility of His being overcome was greater than Adam's because of this."⁷⁵

Because of His trust in His heavenly Father and by the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ triumphed over sin. "In this He is our perfect pattern. Our union with God is by faith, and not by our own efforts. Christ had chosen to live as a human being in total dependence upon God. Nothing could change that. He walked with God by faith as we are to do."⁷⁶

In conclusion, one can appreciate the effort of synthesis attempted by Heppenstall between the traditional Christology and that taught by the authors of the book *Questions on Doctrine*. More than once, he declared that Christ had taken upon Him, not Adam's human nature before the Fall, but rather human nature after 4,000 years of degeneracy of the race. However, if we affirm that sin is merely a spiritual thing akin to a religious nature, and not transmitted genetically, we are left with a Christ who has not really "condemned sin in the flesh," the very mission for which He had been sent by God to fulfill "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3).

Heppenstall's argument tended to be philosophical rather than biblical, and he did not cite Ellen White.

It should be obvious why, after the publication of *The Man Who Is God*, Kenneth Wood felt the burden to reaffirm historical Adventist Christology in his editorial of Christmas 1977. Far from clarifying the problem of Christ's human nature, Heppenstall made it more hypothetical. Recent discoveries in genetics appear to contradict his hypothesis. According to biblical anthropology human beings are a whole; and if the effects of sin are transferable, certainly the same should be true of sin as a power.

J. R. Spangler's Position on Christology While Editor of *Ministry*

We remember the role played by the editor in chief of *Ministry*, Roy Allan Anderson, when "the new milestone of Adventism" was published in 1956. J. R. Spangler succeeded him in 1966, but he managed to remain on the sidelines of the controversy, which was building in intensity through the years. It eventually reached such a point that many found it strange that the editor of *Ministry* would not commit himself on the issue.

The question was put to him: "Why don't the editors of *Ministry* have more to say on the current discussion regarding the nature of Christ and righteousness by faith? Where do you stand on these issues?"⁷⁷

Spangler's reply was frank, direct, and clear. During his 36 years of ministry his view had changed on these points. "Even now," he

wrote, "I hesitate answering such questions for fear of leaving wrong impressions about the nature of the Lord."⁷⁸ But since for the moment there was no General Conference-voted declaration of faith on this subject, he felt free to express his point of view.

"Prior to publication of *Questions on Doctrine* and certain articles appearing in *Ministry*, I hadn't given much thought to the precise nature of Christ. I simply believed He was the God-man and presented Him as such in evangelistic campaigns. During the early years of my ministry, I leaned heavily toward the view that Christ had tendencies and propensities toward evil just as I did. I believed Christ possessed a nature *exactly* like mine, except that He alone never yielded to temptation. However, in the fifties, as the church focused on Christ's nature, my position changed. I now favored the idea that Christ was genuinely man, subject to temptations and failure, but with a sinless human nature totally free from any tendencies or predisposition toward evil."⁷⁹

Having examined what the Bible taught on Christ's human nature, Spangler asked himself questions like these: "Was Jesus born with a corrupt nature like mine? Was He 'estranged from the womb'? Was He by nature a child of wrath? Did He receive wrong traits of character by birth? Did our Lord battle against strong hereditary tendencies to evil with which He was born? If so, which hereditary tendencies and perversions did He have, or did His nature possess *every* variety, although He never yielded?"⁸⁰ Some elements of Ellen White's letter to Pastor Baker, made public in *Questions on Doctrine*, finalized his position—particularly the statement "not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity."⁸¹

Was Jesus really like us? Spangler was not alone in wondering about this fundamental question: Thomas A. Davis, associate editor of the *Review and Herald*, pondered it as well and attempted to offer an answer in his book *Was Jesus Really Like Us?* published in 1979.⁸²

Thomas A. Davis: *Was Jesus Really Like Us?*

If Heppenstall's book had the distinction of being the most complete study among those who claimed that Jesus had a sinless human nature, Davis's book offered an interesting alternative. Thanks to his

earlier publications, Davis's position was well known. His aim at this point was not to repeat his earlier position. In *Was Jesus Really Like Us?* the author tried instead to define who were the "us" that Jesus was supposed to resemble. That was the central point of this study.

Davis invited his readers to look attentively at Hebrews 2:11-17. Verse 11 reads, "*For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all the same origin.* That is why he is not ashamed to call them *brethren*." Verse 12 refers again to the "*brethren*"; in verse 13, "*children* God has given me"; in verse 14, "*the children* [who] share in flesh and blood." Verse 16 says Jesus came to help *Abraham's descendants*. This is why verse 17 specifies that Jesus was "*like his brethren in every respect.*"⁸³

Davis concluded that "those who are sanctified—set apart as children of God—are men and women who, in short, *have been born again.*"⁸⁴ In fact he added, "Latent in the term 'brethren' is, perhaps, one of the most vital clues to an understanding of the human nature of Jesus to be found in all the Bible. The way in which the term is used in Hebrews 2:11-17 opens a vast field of exploration, both in the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy writings."⁸⁵

From Hebrews 2:17 Davis concluded that "Jesus was not incarnated with a nature common to all men. He did not come to this world to be in all aspects like all men. The human nature He was endowed with was not like that of unregenerate sinners. His human nature *was common only with those who have experienced a spiritual rebirth.* Then when we read that Jesus was in all respects like His brethren we understand that He had a nature like born-again people."⁸⁶

This position had been held by other Adventist theologians of the past. Davis referred, among others, to W. W. Prescott, who had written in one of his editorials that "Jesus was born again by the Holy Spirit. . . . When one commits himself to God and submits to be born of the Spirit, he enters upon a new stage of existence, just as Jesus did."⁸⁷ This concept had also been mentioned by Kenneth Wood in his editorial of December 29, 1977.⁸⁸

This does not mean that Jesus might have had to go through a new birth, Davis specified. "Jesus was ever filled with the Spirit, pure, sinless, untainted in the minutest degree by sin. So He never

needed that transforming experience. Thus, when we use the term with reference to Him, we do so in an accommodated sense for want of a better term.”⁸⁹

“When we describe Jesus’ spiritual and moral nature as ‘born again,’ we would not convey the idea that it is just like the moral and spiritual nature of any regenerated person. Jesus is the ideal Man, the Absolute in perfection of character in every respect. A born-again person is still a flawed person from whom Christ is removing the defects.”⁹⁰

Davis interpreted Romans 8:3 to mean “that there is a very close similarity between Christ’s humanity and ours, but that they are not identical. There was a uniqueness in Him that could be found in no one else.”⁹¹

In chapter 6, after examining some Ellen White statements particularly difficult for some to accept, Davis arrived at the “central point” of his argument. “We must keep before us the concept around which our whole investigation pivots, that Jesus had a nature like that of a born-again person. He was ‘made like his *brethren* in every respect,’ ‘yet without sin’ (Heb. 2:17; 4:15). Let us bear in mind that His human nature was ‘identical with our own,’⁹² that He ‘assumed the liabilities of human nature, to be proved and tried,’⁹³ and that He took ‘upon Himself our fallen nature.’^{94, 95}

“If this is true, if we agree that Jesus was not play-acting when He became a Man, then we must accept the concept that He had difficulties with His fallen human nature, just as a human being—a born-again human being—would have. To insist that Jesus’ human nature was less than that of a born-again person, that it was like that of an unregenerate person, is unthinkable. . . . On the other hand, to believe that His nature was superior to that of a born-again person is really to put Him above humanity itself, which is likewise inadmissible. It is to claim for Him advantages that no human being can have, for the new birth is the highest spiritual stage to which mankind can attain in his present state.”⁹⁶

For Davis, Jesus was truly the God-man. “He was a man with a ‘fallen human nature,’ which was ‘degraded and defiled by sin,’ in a ‘deteriorated condition,’ with the same ‘susceptibilities, mental and

physical,' that sinful man has, being subject to 'the weaknesses of humanity,' yet without Himself being sinful, and therefore without guilt. He was sinless, guiltless; His will was unremittingly in concord with His Father's."⁹⁷

William G. Johnsson's Point of View

William G. Johnsson was appointed to the position of editor in chief of the *Adventist Review* as of December 2, 1982. It is important for us to understand his point of view concerning the controversy over Christ's human nature.⁹⁸

He did not directly involve himself in the debate. However, he expressed his ideas in his book on the Epistle to the Hebrews, published in 1979: *In Absolute Confidence: The Book of Hebrews Speaks to Our Day*.⁹⁹ The preface explained that the book was not meant to be a commentary. "The purpose of the work is a basic one: to set out clearly the 'message' of Hebrews and to show its significance for Christians today."¹⁰⁰

One cannot explain Hebrews without speaking of Christology, since the first two chapters affirm both the divinity and the humanity of Jesus Christ. Johnsson considered Jesus to be fully God and fully man. As to His human nature, "the apostle wants us to be absolutely convinced of it [that Christ has become our Brother]. Indeed, his whole argument regarding Jesus as the heavenly High Priest will crash in ruins if he cannot show the humanity. So, while he argues most extensively for the point in Hebrews 2:5-18, he comes back to it over and over."¹⁰¹

But even if Jesus "*identifies Himself* with us," it is on "the basis of family blood ties." He is our blood brother, "not by adoption but by birth. And though His origins place Him far outside our pale, He is not ashamed of us, but ready to proclaim to the assembled universe that we are *His* brothers."¹⁰²

In chapter 3 Johnsson saw Christ's sufferings and temptations as guaranteeing "the genuineness of the full humanity of Jesus Christ."¹⁰³ But he believed the Epistle to the Hebrews did not answer the modern questions at the core of the debate over the nature of Jesus. "The problem is that the New Testament writers were not

conscious of the distinction between 'sinful' and 'sinless' natures and so did not address it. We may be agitated over it, but not they. For them it was sufficient to affirm the reality of the Son's humanity and His testing, the certainty of His sinlessness throughout all temptations, and His ability to help the Christian to overcome in the hour of his testing."¹⁰⁴

In an explanatory note, Johnsson stated, "Only two verses of the New Testament directly address the issue of the 'nature' of Christ, Romans 8:3 and Philippians 2:7. Each verse, however, is ambiguous; so proponents of both sides use both in debate"¹⁰⁵

Though Johnsson did not explicitly come down on one side of the issue in his book, his words suggest that he favors a sinless human nature, that of Adam before the Fall, as his later statements also suggest.¹⁰⁶

Edward W. H. Vick: *Jesus, the Man*

In 1979 yet another book appeared, remarkable in many respects: *Jesus, the Man*, by Edward W. H. Vick. Vick was known in Adventist circles by several of his books, such as *Let Me Assure You*.¹⁰⁷

With diplomas from the universities of London and Oxford, and a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt University, Vick directed the Department of Religious Studies at Forest Fields College, at Nottingham, England, at the time when *Jesus, the Man* appeared in a series of studies on Adventist theology. In his own style Vick sought to reply to the numerous questions that theologians had raised on the subject of the person of Jesus: "Who do people say that I am?"

Quite naturally the problem of the human nature of Jesus was forced upon Vick. He addressed it in chapter 6: "Really, Truly Man." Then, having listed many similar expressions which lie at the root of the Christian faith, Vick remarked: "Notice that these statements do not claim that Jesus in the total range of His person is identical with us. They merely assert that with respect to His humanity He is like us and that this is essential. Essential for what? One influential answer suggests that the identity is necessary for man's salvation. It was said that what is not assumed cannot be saved. To save a human being must be instrumental."¹⁰⁸

Vick concluded: "He is the agency of human redemption by

virtue of His humanity.”¹⁰⁹ Besides, “Jesus’ humanity is a confession of faith. It was a presupposition of faith for the earliest believers and came to explicit statement as occasion demanded, when for example the threat of Docetism questioned it.”¹¹⁰ But obviously it is not easy to speak correctly about Jesus Christ, who is both God and man, “truly God and truly man,” as the Council of Chalcedon defined Him. But Vick asked: “When one says that in Jesus Christ God and man are *one*, what sort of oneness does he mean? Is it right even to speak of a ‘sort’ of oneness?”¹¹¹

To understand this unity, according to Vick, the problem of Jesus Christ must be considered from two viewpoints: one historical, the other experimental. By these two approaches Vick then managed to define the Incarnation in these terms: “Incarnation means that God participates in humanity. It means that although Jesus participates in the structures of sinful human existence as shaped by man, He is not overcome by such participation. . . . Through him who is abandoned, God receives the world unto Himself. Such is the mystery of God’s grace—a mystery experienced by the believer as he comes to find faith in God and as he participates in the renewal of faith from day to day. When man the sinner abandons God, God finds a way to reveal Himself to that man.”¹¹²

Vick insisted that in Christ “God and man are together. The term ‘Incarnation’ expresses an objective reality. In Jesus manhood is realized, and He becomes the firstfruits, the paradigm, the exemplar, the enabling model, the mediator—no one symbol is adequate. . . . Language which allows Jesus neither to be really God or to be really man” is “quite unacceptable.” “Nothing must compromise Jesus’ real humanity. We must allow no hybridizing of any kind.”¹¹³

Such was Vick’s viewpoint on the humanity of Jesus. In a sense he returns to Ellen White’s definition: “The completeness of His humanity, the perfection of His divinity, form for us a strong ground upon which we may be brought into reconciliation with God.”¹¹⁴

With Edward Vick’s testimony the decade of the 1970s came to a close. During this period the Christology of the pioneers was reaffirmed in many ways by the dominant publications of the church. Confronted with this reinvigorated traditional teaching, those op-

posed to it tried various compromise formulas involving a mediating position as the key to the human nature Christ, or simply decided to live with both positions. This trend culminated in June 1985 with the simultaneous and side-by-side publication in *Ministry* magazine of the two opposing interpretations.

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³¹ Jack D. Walker, *Documents From the Palmdale Conference on Righteousness by Faith* (Goodlettsville, Tenn.: 1976).

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 36-41; *Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 647-660.

³³ Desmond Ford, quoted in Gillian Ford, *The Human Nature of Christ in Salvation*, pp. 8, 9.

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³⁵ The periodical *Evangelica*, published by Andrews University students who were Ford's followers, is an example. It systematically sets in opposition "evangelical Adventism against traditional Adventism."

³⁶ See Desmond Ford's paper presented at the Glacier View Conference, Colorado, in August 1980.

³⁷ Steinweg (p. 12) mentions the names of those who approved of the publication of the manuscript by Douglass: Elders Pierson, Rampton, Nigri, Eva, Hyde, Leshner, Dower. It was not an approval of Douglass' thesis concerning the fallen human nature assumed by Christ, but rather the acceptance of its publication in the Sabbath school lessons in harmony with the spirit of the Palmdale Conference. The opposite opinion was given in the lessons of the first quarter 1983. See our chapter 13, pp. 175, 177.

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- ⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 136, 137.
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- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24. (Italics supplied.)
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- ⁸⁹ Davis, *Was Jesus Really Like Us?* p. 35.
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THE CREST OF THE CONTROVERSY

After more than 25 years of controversy over Christ's human nature, a cooling off period might have been expected. On the contrary, the intensity of the discussion built to a crescendo in the period 1980 to 1985.

While the traditional Christology was gaining in popularity, the new theology appeared to be running out of steam, sending its proponents looking for new arguments. Faced with ever more compelling criticisms, the supporters of the new theology endeavored to harmonize the two opposing positions as though they were of equal worth and merit.

A Zealous Defender of Traditional Christology

As we have already shown, Wieland and Short were first to alert the church to the new interpretations regarding the person and work of Christ.¹ To study the issue, the General Conference appointed a special committee, whose findings were published in the report of the Palmdale conference after several meetings. Genuinely dissatisfied with the results, Wieland sought to clarify the issue by publishing in 1977 a book entitled *How Could Christ Be Sinless as a Baby?*² In 1979 he wrote again to answer additional questions regarding traditional Christology.³

Having been a missionary, Wieland was well versed in matters of African mores. He was invited back to Africa for the express purpose of preparing on location a variety of books catering to the spiritual

needs of Christians in the sub-Saharan continent. While in Africa he published in 1981, among other works, a study of Christ's human nature entitled *The Broken Link*.⁴

In the preface Wieland stated that the purpose of his book was "to attempt to clear up *apparent or supposed* contradictions on the subject of the humanity of Christ. The full divinity of Christ is fundamental and is assumed to be understood. Our only problem under discussion here is *what kind of humanity did Christ take or assume in His incarnation*. That He retained His full divinity in His Incarnation is not questioned in the least."⁵

Wieland recognized that there appeared to be some contradictions in the many statements of Ellen White on the nature of Christ. "But when her statements are studied in context, the *paradoxes* demonstrate that she took her own advice seriously to 'be careful, exceedingly careful as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ.' She did not avoid the subject and neither should we, for 'it is everything to us,' 'the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God,' there must be no broken link in the chain."⁶

For Wieland, "probably the clearest and most beautiful presentation of Christ as 'God with us' since apostolic times is found in the 1888 message of Christ's righteousness." But this message contained a stumbling block for many who feared that Christ's innocence would be violated. Not at all, Wieland affirms. "The 1888 messengers maintained that Christ's righteousness was lived by Him in a human nature identical to ours, and that when God's people truly understand and receive this 'righteousness by faith' they will be enabled to overcome as Christ overcame."⁷

Wieland posed 32 questions and responded with Scripture and Ellen White statements. First, Wieland showed that there was no internal contradiction in the Bible regarding Christ's human nature.⁸ Then he demonstrated that Ellen White never opposed the teaching of Waggoner or Jones on this matter.⁹ He went on to show that the letter written to Baker in 1895 was not intended to discredit their point of view.¹⁰ His analysis of some statements contained in the Baker letter revealed that they were not contrary to teachings of Ellen White found elsewhere.¹¹

Wieland replied to a series of inquiries from people who understandably could not accept the notion that Jesus might have lived a sinless life in a fallen human nature. Not only does he place some quotations contained in *Questions on Doctrine* in their proper context, but he refuted certain erroneous statements, such as “Jesus assumed a sinless human nature,” pointing out that “Ellen White herself *never* wrote these words at any time; they are solely the suppositions of the editors.”¹² In short, this study contained detailed answers to many of the basic questions that can be raised about Christ’s human nature.

In 1983 the Pacific Press published the book *Gold Tried in the Fire*,¹³ in which Wieland explained “what Christ needs in order to be our substitute,” that is, “gold tried in the fire,” as the title suggests. In fact, according to Wieland, “Christ cannot be our Substitute unless He has met our temptations as we must meet them. He must meet our enemy on his own ground, in his own lair, and there slay him.”¹⁴

When commenting later on Romans 8:3, 4, Wieland wrote: “Paul’s word *likeness* cannot mean unlikeness, for it would be a monstrous fraud for Christ to profess to condemn sin in the flesh, the flesh in which Paul says we are ‘sold under sin’ where ‘the law of sin’ operates, if He counterfeited His Incarnation by taking only what *appeared* to be our sinful flesh but which was not the real thing at all. . . . Paul uses the word *likeness* (with good reason) to denote the reality of Christ’s full identity with us, yet making clear that He in no way participated in our sin. Christ’s glorious victory lay in the fact that He was ‘tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin’ (Heb. 4:15).”¹⁵

Drawing from this “victory” the obvious conclusion, Wieland encouraged his readers to conquer temptation as Christ did: “No matter who you are or where you are, you can know that One has stood exactly in your place, ‘yet without sinning.’ Look at Him, ‘see’ Him, with all those clouds of deception blown away by the truth of His righteousness ‘in the likeness of sinful flesh.’ Believe that the sin that allures you has been ‘condemned in the flesh.’ You *can* overcome, through that faith in Him.”¹⁶

The New Christology in the Sabbath School Lessons

As previously stated, the Sabbath school lessons prepared for

1977 by Herbert E. Douglass taught that Christ had assumed Adam's human nature after the Fall. In contrast, the lessons prepared by Norman R. Gulley, Bible teacher at Southern Missionary College, for the first quarter of 1983 taught that Christ's spiritual nature was pre-Fall but His physical nature was post-Fall. Indeed, Gulley attempted to prove that the two ways of understanding Christ's human nature actually enhanced each other.

To make his point, Gulley explained this enhancement theory in detail in his book *Christ Our Substitute*.¹⁷ "Seventh-day Adventists believe that Jesus Christ was fully God and fully man. But we can look at the phrase 'fully man' in two ways. Jesus had either (1) un-fallen human nature, such as Adam possessed prior to the Fall, or (2) fallen human nature. Which is correct? He took both. For Christ took the spiritual nature of man before the Fall, and the physical nature of man after the Fall."¹⁸

Gulley attempted a synthesis of the two interpretations. He claimed the support of Ellen White. He wrote: "If she is defending His sinlessness, then the pre-fall nature is defended. If she is defending His limited humanity, then His post-fall nature is defended."¹⁹

The explanation may at first appear attractive. At least it has the merit of brunting the opposition between the two ideas. But some might argue that it creates more confusion by attributing to Christ two human natures in addition to His divine nature. Comments and objections abound in the letters from readers section of the *Adventist Review*. The following is taken from the pen of Donald K. Short:

"Ellen White speaks not a single word about 'the pre-Fall nature' of Christ, and to intimate such is to put words into her mouth and promote confusion. There is no place where she sets Jesus apart from His people and tries to have a 'balance' between the prelapsarian and postlapsarian natures. How dare this sort of confusion be promoted in the name of 'unity within our church'?"²⁰

Herbert Douglass sent two articles to the editor of the *Adventist Review*, both to be published at Christmas in 1983 under the meaningful title "Why the Angels Sang Over Bethlehem."²¹ Without rehashing Douglass's entire point of view, we note his list of distinctive expressions borrowed both from Ellen White and leading theolo-

gians regarding the human nature of Christ:

“Although Jesus . . . [was] taking ‘our fallen nature,’ ‘the place of fallen Adam,’ ‘human nature . . . in the likeness of sinful flesh, and was tempted of Satan as all children are tempted,’ ‘the nature of Adam, the transgressor,’ ‘the offending nature of man,’ and many other similar expressions, these scholars and Ellen White are clear that our Lord’s fallen, degraded human equipment did not force Him to sin either in thought or act. He remained unsullied and untainted, even though He was tempted from within and without.”²²

Other protests were made directly to H. F. Rampton, director of the Sabbath School Department at the General Conference level. One of them, dated January 19, 1983, was sent by the leaders of the Anderson church in California. They expressed their concern about “serious doctrinal errors,” introduced “subtly” via the medium of the Sabbath school lessons. “We feel these lessons represent a deliberate effort to ‘soften up’ the constituency and prepare the Sabbath school members to receive new theological concepts totally contrary to traditional Adventist beliefs, beliefs founded on sound biblical principles and the Spirit of Prophecy.”²³

“The lesson for January 15 leaves the human nature of Christ in the Incarnation in confusion, but with a decided bias to that of an ‘unfallen’ nature.”²⁴ The choice of Ellen White quotations was criticized. “The doctrine of the ‘unfallen nature of Christ’ is vital to the new theology concept. Satan has labored diligently to introduce ‘new theology’ concepts into the Adventist Church. In the 1950s Satan worked through a group of leading theologians to promote this ‘Christology,’ but the church did not receive it. Is Satan now using the Sabbath school to accomplish his purpose?”²⁵

The periodical *Voice of Present Truth*, though not a denominational publication, published letters from groups and church members scandalized by the introduction of “the new theology” into the church by way of the Sabbath school lessons. With the mission of “representing the foundation principles of the Advent Movement,”²⁶ this periodical devoted the March 1983 number entirely to the reaffirmation of the traditional teaching on the subject of Christ’s human nature. To accomplish that goal, articles were requested of such au-

thors as Herbert E. Douglass and Dennis E. Priebe.

The Voice of Present Truth

The article by Herbert Douglass bore the title written in large letters at the top of the first page: "The Model Man." There was in fact nothing in this article that Douglass had not previously said. The objective was not to present new truths, but to recall old ones.

Douglass wrote: "God did not come halfway to earth in His attempt to redeem men and women: He did not come as a sympathetic angel, or even as a superman, impregnable to all of humanity's troubles and weaknesses. The ladder from heaven to earth reached *all the way down to where sinners are*. 'If that ladder had failed by a single step of reaching the earth, we should have been lost. But Christ reaches us where we are. He took our nature and overcame, that we through taking His nature might overcome' (*The Desire of Ages*, pp. 311, 312)." ²⁷

Naturally, the aim of Douglass's article was to show that "Jesus entered the human family, taking the same nature as all other 'descendants of Abraham.' . . . The real Jesus was a real Man, *except He did not sin*." ²⁸ However, He was tempted as we are in all things. To make his point, Douglass quoted the most powerful statements of Ellen White on the subject.

Among others, Douglass recalled Ellen White's answer to those who had assumed that if Jesus had indeed possessed the same nature as all humans, like them He would have succumbed to temptations. "*If He did not have man's nature, He could not be our example*. If He was not a partaker of our nature, He could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for Him to yield to temptation, He could not be our helper. It was a solemn reality that Christ came to fight the battles as man, in man's behalf. His temptation and victory tell us that *humanity must copy the Pattern*; man must become a partaker of the divine nature (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 408)." ²⁹

The article by Dennis E. Priebe, at that time a Bible teacher at Pacific Union College in California, also deserves our attention. For him, "the pivotal doctrine, the issue which determines the direction of both systems of belief, the foundation and premise of the whole

controversy, is the question 'What is sin?' You see, the gospel is all about how we are saved from sin. It is sin which has caused us to be lost, and the gospel is the good news of how God redeems us from sin. Now most of us have assumed that we know what sin is, without taking the time to define sin."³⁰

First Priebe addressed the question of original sin. According to the Reformers, "original sin is simply the belief that we are guilty because of our birth as sons and daughters of Adam. This doctrine teaches that we are guilty by nature, before any choice of good or evil can enter the picture."³¹ Priebe remarked accordingly: "In this view, weakness, imperfections, and tendencies are sin. It is an interesting and significant point that the Reformers built their doctrine of original sin on the premise of predestination. . . . So it is a bit strange that while predestination has been rejected by most Christians today, original sin is still seen as the foundation of correct gospel teaching."³²

"Obviously, He [Christ] must have a sinless nature, totally unlike the nature you and I inherit from birth. . . . Because of the belief that sinful nature involves guilt in the sight of God, it is absolutely imperative that Christ have no connection with our sinful nature."³³

Priebe's view on the nature of sin was quite different. For him, "sin is not basically the way man *is*, but the way man *chooses*. Sin is when the mind *consents* to what seems desirable and thus breaks its relationship with God. To talk of guilt in terms of inherited nature is to overlook the important category of responsibility. Not until we have joined our own will to mankind's rebellion against God, not until we have entered into opposition to the will of God, does guilt enter in. Sin is concerned with a man's life, his rebellion against God, his willful disobedience, and the disturbed relationship with God which ensues. Sin is concerned with a man's will rather than his nature. If responsibility for sin is to have any meaning, it cannot also be affirmed that fallen human nature makes the man inevitably guilty of sin. Inevitability and responsibility are mutually exclusive concepts in the moral sphere. Thus sin is defined as choosing willfully to rebel against God in thought, word, or action. In this gospel, sin is our willful choice to exercise our fallen nature in opposition to God's will."³⁴

Priebe applied his definition of sin to Christ's nature, for he wrote: "If sin is not nature but choice, then Christ could inherit our fallen nature without thereby becoming a sinner. He remained ever sinless because His conscious choice was always obedience to God, never allowing His fallen nature to control His choices. His inheritance was just the same as our inheritance, with no need to resort to special intervention by God to prevent Jesus from receiving human fullness from Mary. Christ accepted voluntarily the humiliation of descending not only to the level of unfallen man, but to the level to which man had fallen through the sin of Adam and the sins of succeeding generations. Man was not in the state of Adam before the Fall, so something far more drastic was needed if the effects of Adam's fall were to be overcome. Christ must descend to the depths to which mankind had fallen and in His own person lift mankind from its depths to a new level of life. Jesus stooped from the very heights to the very depths to lift us up, to be our Saviour."³⁵

Then Priebe considered what would have happened "if Jesus had assumed a perfect human nature," or Adam's nature before the Fall. He would have been "untouched by the Fall," "then He did not stand side by side with man in his need," "there would have been a great gulf between Jesus and those whom He represented before God. . . . If Jesus assumed perfect human nature, He spanned the gulf between God and man, but the gulf between fallen and unfallen man still needed to be bridged."³⁶

"If, however," Priebe added, "Christ shared our fallen human nature, then His mediatorial work bridges the whole gulf from fallen man, in his dire need, to God. Only by entering into our situation in the deepest and fullest sense and identifying Himself fully with us was He able to be our Saviour. Any other conditions except in fallen flesh would have been challenged at once by the enemy and would have influenced the thinking of their universe."³⁷

This way of understanding Christ's human nature, Priebe wrote, was that proclaimed by Waggoner and Jones in 1888, plainly supported by Ellen White. "In fact, this understanding of Christ's life was the accenting power of the message—the Lord Jesus Christ, who was loyal to God in fallen flesh."³⁸

Considering the practical application of the message of justification, Priebe approached it on two fronts: "From here the gospel message moves to our situation. The gospel is the good news about God's character—that God both forgives and restores. The gospel is both God's declaration that we stand righteous in the merits of Christ and God's renovation of our sinful lives so that, gradually, we may be restored into His image. The gospel is both a legal verdict and transforming power. Union with Christ is the key to the faith through which justification must take place. The gospel includes justification, a uniting with Christ by faith on the basis of which we are declared righteous, and sanctification, a growing more like Christ through the daily exercise of a constantly growing faith on the basis of which we are made righteous."³⁹

In 1985 Priebe developed in detail each one of his arguments in a book published by the Pacific Press, entitled *Face to Face With the Real Gospel*.⁴⁰ We cite only one very appropriate remark: "As a church, we have never formally defined our beliefs in these three critical areas—sin, Christ, and perfection. And because of our unclarity and divergent views in these areas, we have been wandering in the theological desert of uncertainty and frustration for these past forty years. Further, because we have held contradictory views in these areas, we have been unable clearly to define our message and mission."⁴¹

The contrast between the different Christologies found clarification in an excellent doctoral thesis Eric Claude Webster defended at the theological faculty of Stellenbosch University, Cape Province, in South Africa, and published in 1984 under the title *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology*.⁴²

Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology

Like a skillful surgeon, Eric Claude Webster⁴³ laid bare the very heart of Adventist Christology in his voluminous work on the subject. In the first chapter Webster addressed the problem of Christology in its various historical settings. In succeeding chapters he analysed the Christologies of four eminent Adventist writers and theologians: Ellen G. White, Ellet J. Waggoner, Edward A. Heppenstall, and Herbert E. Douglass, two representing the genera-

tion of the pioneers and two contemporaries. In the final chapter he summarized his thoughts regarding these four Christologies, which are indeed representative of the different currents and crosscurrents in Adventist Christology.

We have already examined the position proposed by each of these authors and will avoid repetition here. Of special interest are Webster's unique personal insights regarding the controversy over Christ's human nature. For example, he classified Ellen White's and Heppenstall's Christologies as ontological; Waggoner's as speculative; and that of Douglass as functional.

Webster also extracted what he considered to be the dominant factor in each Christology. For Ellen White, Waggoner, and Heppenstall, it was the *person* of Jesus, whereas for Douglass it was the *work* of Christ. As to the main objective pursued by each, he contended that Ellen White focused on the manifestation of God's character, while Waggoner highlighted the completion of holiness in man, Heppenstall looked at the objective of salvation, and Douglass emphasized the likeness to Christ.

As for the human nature of Jesus, Webster confirmed the analyses we have made so far for each of these authors. However, his conclusions regarding Ellen White differed on certain important points: "In relation to sin we found that Ellen White has Christ coming to earth in the post-Fall nature of man with all the 'innocent infirmities and weaknesses of man,' together with the imputed sin and guilt of the world, thus bearing vicariously the guilt and punishment for all sin; and yet, in a nature that was sinless and without corruption, pollution, defilement, sinful propensities and tendencies or taint of sin."⁴⁴

Webster, then, reaffirmed the postlapsarian position of Ellen White. However, he alluded to "innocent infirmities" in single quotes, as if this expression were from Ellen White. As previously stated, this expression was never used by Ellen White; as for the word "vicariously," she never used it at all in her writings.

In presenting his own personal point of view, Webster seemed to agree essentially with Heppenstall.⁴⁵ He wrote: "During the Incarnation Jesus Christ exercised His divinity in order to be fully God, and . . . His humanity in order to be fully Man." But above

all, "Jesus Christ came into the world in the humanity of Adam after the fall and not before the fall. He assumed humanity affected by the laws of heredity and subject to weakness, infirmity and temptation."⁴⁶ "However," Webster added: "Jesus Christ, while coming in fallen human nature, was not infected by original sin and was born without any tendencies and propensities to sin, thus, we need have no misgivings concerning His absolute sinlessness."⁴⁷ Nevertheless, "Jesus Christ freely chose to assume not only a nature like ours in all respects, sin excepted, but also a common situation of suffering, alienation and lostness, by coming in mortal flesh, vicariously taking our guilt, punishment and separation on Himself."⁴⁸

Webster's study is a gold mine for those who wish for a better understanding of the current problem at the heart of the controversy in the Adventist Church. His position in favor of the post-Fall nature of Christ constitutes a positive vote in favor of the traditional Christology. However, some would see a contradiction within Webster's positions. On one hand, he affirms that "Jesus assumes humanity *affected* by the law of heredity," while on the other, he affirms that he was not "*infected* by original sin and was born without any tendencies and propensities to sin." Our objections regarding those who declare that Christ was without tendencies to sin, and inherited only "innocent infirmities," apply to Webster as well. In fact, these statements are neither biblical nor in harmony with Ellen White's teaching.

The Two Christologies Face-to-face

In response to the controversy, J. Robert Spangler, editor of *Ministry*, requested two theologians, each one a specialist in the subject, to present their points of view for the benefit of Adventist pastors. In an editorial dated June 1985 he wrote, "We have purposely avoided placing anything in our journal dealing with the nature of Christ for several years. My editorial in the April 1978 *Ministry* testified to my own struggle with this subject. I pointed out that I had been overwhelmed with feelings of inadequacy in attempting to express my convictions."⁴⁹

"Yet, in view of the fact that there are those who earnestly believe that the church will fall or rise on its understanding of Christ

and His nature, and in view of the renewed printing and verbal discussion on the subject, I feel that both sides of this question should be examined again. Therefore, we are setting forth two rather lengthy articles from two Adventist scholars.”⁵⁰

Spangler took pains to emphasize the common thread in the two interpretations. “Both sides believe that our Lord was fully human and fully divine; that He was tempted in all points like as we are; that He could have fallen into sin, thus aborting the entire plan of salvation, but that He never committed one sin. (It seems that to a large degree the difference in views may be attributed to different understanding of what constitutes sinful nature. There may be much less separating the two sides in this debate than there seems to be.)”⁵¹

After reviewing the points of agreements, the editor pondered a few fundamental questions upon which the debate hinged. “Did our Lord in His human nature begin where all the other children of Adam began? Did Christ take the human nature of pre-or post-Fall man? If the human race was affected by the Fall of Adam and Eve, was Christ also affected the same way or was He exempt? If Christ accepted sinless human nature, did He have an advantage over us? Did He vicariously take upon Himself fallen human nature? If He took fallen human nature, was the ‘fallen’ element related only to the physical and not to His moral character? Is it possible to settle the issue of the nature of Christ, which the Christian church has struggled with for two thousand years? Is it necessary for us to have a very definitive and accurate understanding of Christ’s nature in order to be saved? Must Christ have our fallen nature (without ever sinning, of course) in order for Christians to live the unsullied life that He lived?”⁵²

These were the questions to which the two appointed theologians had to respond. To avoid influencing the readers, the two presentations were published under pseudonyms. In a later issue the real names were revealed: Norman R. Gulley and Herbert E. Douglass.

1. Gulley: Human Nature Before the Fall

Gulley defended the prelapsarian position. But contrary to the custom of those who shared this view, he did not establish his position on the basis of Ellen White statements. His presentation hinged essentially

on the exegetical study of Christological Bible verses.⁵³ He believed that all doctrinal truth should be founded on scriptural grounds.

Gulley did a linguistic and theological study to define the meaning of the Greek words *sarx*, *hamartia*, *isos*, *homoionoma*, *monogenes*, and *prototokos*, and the significance of the expressions "Abraham's descendants" (Heb. 2:16) and "descendant of David" (Rom. 1:3). His main premise: "Throughout the investigation we will document the overwhelming evidence that Jesus did in fact take a sinless human nature at birth (spiritually) while possessing a similar physical nature to others of His day."⁵⁴

Only one text, he claimed, directly related *the flesh* and *sin*: "It is sin living in me" (Rom. 7:17). "Therefore '*sarx*' does not necessarily mean '*sinful*.' . . . In 1 Timothy 3:16 it is not *soma* but *sarx*. It merely means '*infleshment*,' not '*sinful*.'"⁵⁵

Then Gulley discussed the meaning of the word "likeness" in Romans 8:3, Philippians 2:7, and Hebrews 2:17 to conclude that "Jesus was only *similar* to other humans in having a sin-affected *physical* human body, but not the *same* as other humans, for He alone was sinless in His *spiritual* relationship with God."⁵⁶

Dealing with sin, Gulley considered that it could not be defined just as an "act." "That is too superficial a definition. Though sin includes wrong choices, and therefore acts, and even thoughts (see Matt. 5:28), it also includes nature. If we were not born sinners, then we would not need a Saviour until a first act or thought of sin. Such an idea does terrible disservice to the tragic consequences of sin and to the mission of Christ, as the only Saviour for every human (John 14:6; Acts 4:12). It also means that if Jesus came with a sinful nature but resisted, then perhaps someone else will do the same, and that person would not need Jesus to save him."⁵⁷

Quoting Psalms 51:7; 22:10; 139:13, and others, Gulley argued that all are sinners, with the exception of Christ. The fact that Jesus was sinless does not justify the immaculate conception. "But if God could perform such a salvific act for one human, why not for all? This would have saved Christ all the anguish of becoming human. Besides, if Mary became immaculate without Christ, this calls Christ's mission into question."⁵⁸

According to biblical statements, Jesus was “unique,” *monogenes*; “the firstborn,” *prototokos*. Certainly these expressions should not be interpreted literally, Gulley specified. “They imply that He was one of a kind, unique. His mission was to become the new Adam, the new firstborn, or head, of the race. This qualified Him to be our representative, high priest, and intercessor in the great controversy. Jesus is our example in His life, *but not in birth*. . . . He was born sinless to meet our first need of Him as Saviour, when we are born sinners.”⁵⁹

According to Gulley, the verses stating that Jesus is a “descendant” of Abraham and of David “are not considering the *nature* but the *mission* of Christ. They are not concerned with the type of flesh in which He was born (sinless or sinful). . . . Mission and not nature is the context.”⁶⁰ “Not until His death did He, ‘who knew no sin,’ become ‘sin for us’ (2 Cor. 5:21, KJV). Never before that moment did sin bring a separation from His Father, which caused Him to cry out, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ (Matt. 27:46, KJV). The man Jesus became sin for us in *mission* at death and not in *nature* at birth.”⁶¹

In his “doxology,” Gulley said forcefully that “Christology is the center and heart of theology, for Jesus Christ is the greatest revelation of God to man. He is also the best revelation of authentic man to man. Jesus Christ was unique not only as God with us but as man with us. He was sinless divinity united with sin-weakened human flesh, but He was equally sinless in both natures.”⁶²

But true Christology, Gulley explained, is not complete with adoration, obedience, and praise only. By contemplating Christ we become like Him (2 Cor. 3:18). Also, Gulley concluded, “Christology climaxes in the exclamation: ‘I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me’ (Gal. 2:20, KJV). Only in this dependent union can Jesus be our model man—never in His nature at birth.”⁶³

No one would blame Gulley for basing his demonstration solely on the Scriptures, while his predecessors had based theirs mainly on Ellen White’s writings.⁶⁴ But his exegesis is similar to that found in the majority of orthodox Protestant theologians, which puts him in contradiction to the pioneers and Ellen White.

2. Douglass: Human Nature After the Fall

Herbert E. Douglass was quite correct when he told his readers that if they had lived before 1950 they would have been completely oblivious of the present controversy. For “until the third quarter of the twentieth century Adventist spokesmen consistently set forth Jesus as one who took our fallen nature.”⁶⁵

Douglass refocused the attention of his readers on the question of “why” rather than “how.” According to him, “the salvation issue is not primarily *how* God became man, but *why*. . . . Without question, mystery envelops the Incarnation. But the mystery is regarding *how* God and man were blended, not *why*.”⁶⁶

In fact, “the issue seems stalemated until we ask *why* He came the way He did. If we do not face this question correctly, every other Biblical theme seems to become distorted.”⁶⁷ On the contrary, the plan of salvation appears in its simplicity when the question is asked: “*Why* did Jesus, like every baby two thousand years ago, take the condition of fallen mankind and not that of Adam ‘in his innocence in Eden’”?⁶⁸

Many non-Adventist theologians have challenged the traditional view that Christ took Adam’s nature before the Fall and have taken the postlapsarian position. Douglass named about 15 of them.⁶⁹ “None of these men,” he wrote, “believed that Christ sinned in either thought or act or that because He took fallen sinful flesh He needed a Saviour. Generally speaking, the term *sin-ful flesh* means the human condition in all of its aspects as affected by the fall of Adam and Eve. Such a nature is susceptible to temptation from within as from without. Contrary to the Grecian dualism that early pervaded much of orthodox Christianity, the flesh is not evil, nor does it sin of itself. Although the flesh is amoral, it does provide the equipment, the occasion, and the seat for sin if the human will is not constantly assisted by the Holy Spirit. But a person born with sinful flesh need not be a sinner.”⁷⁰

What are the implications of teaching that Jesus had a sinless nature? “To suggest that He was born free from the liabilities of heredity is to go down the same road that Roman Catholicism started upon when it confused sin with physical substance. . . . No Biblical

evidence suggests that the stream of human heredity was broken between Mary and Jesus.”⁷¹

Nothing shows better the solidarity of Jesus with the human race than the manner of presenting Himself under the name of the Son of man (Matt. 8:20; 24:27, etc.), and the analogy that Paul established between Christ and Adam (Rom. 5; 1 Cor. 15). “Many consider Romans 5:12 as evidence that men and women are born sinners, but such is not Paul’s argument. He is simply stating an obvious fact—the stream of death began with Adam.

“But Adam’s descendants all die ‘*because all men sinned.*’ . . . The assumption that Jesus took Adam’s pre-Fall nature seems to destroy the force of Paul’s parallel and his principle of solidarity. Paul’s Adam-Christ analogy becomes relevant to mankind and to the great controversy only if Jesus incorporated Himself within fallen humanity—only if He met sin in the arena where all men are, ‘in Adam,’ and conquered every appeal to serve self, whether from within or without. Jesus intended that those in Him would be united corporately with the results of His saving work. But to accomplish this, He must first have been corporately connected with humanity in its fallen condition.”⁷²

Douglass then made the point that Paul was very careful in his choice of words in Romans 8:3. Why did he say in this case, “*en homoiomati sarkos hamartias*” (in the likeness of sinful flesh) rather than simply “*en sarki hamartias*” (in sinful flesh)?⁷³ Douglass quoted C.E.B. Cranfield, the professor of theology at Durham University: “The intention is not in any way to call in question . . . the reality of Christ’s *sarx hamartias*, but to draw attention to the fact that, while the Son of God truly assumed *sarx hamartias*, He never became *sarx hamartias* and nothing more, nor even *sarx hamartias* indwelt by the Holy Spirit.” “We . . . understand Paul’s thought [concerning his use of *homoiōma* here] to be that the Son of God assumed the selfsame fallen human nature that is ours, but that in His case that fallen human nature was never the whole of Him—He never ceased to be the eternal Son of God.”⁷⁴

Analyzing the Christological verses in the Epistle to the Hebrews (2:11-18; 4:15; 5:7-9), Douglass showed the necessity of a high

priest's being in solidarity with humanity. "One of the principal lines of argument in Hebrews is that the high priest's efficacy depends upon how closely he identifies with those for whom he mediates. Jesus is a perfect high priest because of His real identification with man's predicaments, whether of the spirit (temptations) or of the body (privations and death)." ⁷⁵

"For we have not a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. . . . *Let us then with confidence draw near* (Heb. 4:15, 16)." ⁷⁶ "Jesus was victorious with the same liabilities and disadvantages common to all mankind; therefore, men and women can also be victorious with the same help He depended on if they too 'draw near' in time of need." ⁷⁷

For Christ to be a perfect high priest, the Epistle to the Hebrews demands that "Jesus must be one with man in every respect from the standpoint of human *equipment* (the principle of solidarity), but He is not one with them as a sinner, that is, from the standpoint of human *performance* (the principle of dissimilarity). . . . In the Incarnation, the Saviour became a man in every essential respect; He was beset with all the human liabilities. . . . In taking on man's nature as it was when He became incarnate, Jesus spanned the gulf between heaven and earth, God and man. In so doing, He became the ladder that was both secure in heaven and planted solidly on earth, one that men and women could trust." ⁷⁸

For Douglass there was not a shadow of doubt: "Until the third quarter of the twentieth century Adventist spokesmen consistently set forth Jesus as one who took our fallen nature. Like many non-Adventist scholars, they would have been appalled at the nonsequitur that to believe Jesus took fallen human nature necessitates believing also that He had to be a sinner. Or that *He* would need a Saviour!" ⁷⁹ "In no way did a taint of sin rest on Jesus—because He was never a sinner. He never had 'an evil propensity' because He never sinned. Genuine temptations, real enticements to satisfy worthy desires in self-centered ways—unquestionably our Lord experienced these with every possibility of yielding. But 'not for one moment' did Jesus permit temptations to conceive and give birth to

sin. He too waged stern battles with self and against potentially sinful hereditary tendencies, but He never permitted an inclination to become sinful (see James 1:14, 15). He kept saying No, while all other human beings have said Yes.”⁸⁰

In closing, Douglass once more posed the question that should direct all research into the human nature of Jesus: “Why did Jesus come to earth?” “*The reason for His coming determined the way He came*—or else His coming would not have fulfilled its purpose. He gloriously triumphed over evil; He became the suitable substitute, the pioneer man, mankind’s model. And He achieved all this amid the worst of circumstances, exempt from nothing, in the same heredity shared by men and women He came to save.”⁸¹

It is interesting to note that Douglass’s presentation, like that of Gulley, is supported entirely by New Testament verses. However, to prove that his conclusions were in harmony with the traditional teaching of the church, Douglass was careful, in a note, to list 27 Adventist authors with supporting statements from them, along with telling statements from Ellen White.⁸²

Reciprocal Review of the Thesis and Antithesis

Later the editor of *Ministry* requested the two writers to critique each other’s articles in the August 1985 issue.⁸³

Douglass, who was first, pointed out that Gulley’s view arrived on the scene of the Adventist Church only in the 1950s. “The consequences of these changes have had much to do with the trauma and theological divisions the church has experienced in the past thirty years.”⁸⁴

Douglass pointed out that Gulley had “not differentiated between inherited human equipment and performance within the humanity degenerated by the consequences of sin.”⁸⁵ In fact, what Gulley advanced as the human nature of Jesus corresponded with the holy flesh heresy “that Jesus took Adam’s pre-Fall nature. Members of that movement believed that Jesus received from Mary a sin-weakened physical nature. But they also believed that He received from the Holy Spirit the pre-Fall spiritual nature of Adam and thus was spared the full impact of the law of heredity.”⁸⁶ Now, “an erroneous un-

derstanding of the Incarnation has very unfortunate practical results, especially when one tries to harmonize error with truth.”⁸⁷

With respect to the theory of salvation, Douglass considered that Gulley had been strongly influenced by his Christology. “Why Jesus became man, it seems to me, can be understood only from the standpoint of the great controversy—a perspective largely missing in ‘orthodox’ Protestantism as well as in Catholicism. Jesus did not come to satisfy an offended God who needed blood before He would forgive, or to prove that God could keep God’s laws, or even that Adam could have remained obedient.”⁸⁸

Gulley, in turn, tackled Douglass’s argument that “Jesus was not a sinner in birth, because all men are sinless in birth. For one ‘born with sinful flesh need not be a sinner.’”⁸⁹

According to Gulley, the Bible opposes such an idea. “It indicates that all men are ‘constituted sinners by Adam’s transgression in a way similar to that by which they are constituted righteous by the obedience of Christ.’ Precisely. Douglass overlooks this parallel in Romans 5. We are sinners in *birth* and righteous in *Christ*. Only the two Adams entered planet earth sinless. All others are born sinners.”⁹⁰

Christ did not come into this world “as a prodigal but as the God-man. . . . Hence, as the second Adam, He came, not in the image of man, but *in the exact image of God* (Col. 1:15; Heb. 1:1-3).”⁹¹ Further, “Douglass’s view on propensities is simply too superficial. Propensities are within fallen nature, by definition, before any act of sin. But Jesus didn’t have these propensities. No wonder Satan found no evil in Him (John 14:30). . . . The creative image of God has nothing to do with the Fall. That realm is confined to the image of man.”⁹²

Gulley pointed out the contradictions in Douglass’s argument that “Christ took the post-Fall human nature,” while admitting that there was no “‘taint of sin,’ no ‘evil propensities,’ or sin-weakened will like ours. . . . These exemptions destroy His exact identity with us.”⁹³

“Douglass states that *why* Jesus became human is more important than *how* He became human. . . . But all six reasons Douglass gives were fully satisfied by Jesus’ coming as spiritually sinless in a sin-weakened physical nature.”⁹⁴ “We must never lose sight of the fact

that Christ's identity as God is more important than His solidarity with humanity. He is not just another man, but God become man."⁹⁵

In closing, Gulley agreed with Douglass "that Jesus was a real man, that He was really tempted and could have failed, and that His dependence upon God provides us an example. We agree that He remained sinless. . . . Isn't Douglass' Jesus too human? Does he give adequate and appropriate recognition of His divinity?"⁹⁶

The reciprocal response brought nothing new. Each writer stuck to his position. To some extent the standoff was a matter of semantics: the two writers gave different meanings to basic biblical and theological terms.

Reviews and Questions From Readers of *Ministry*

To widen the circle, *Ministry* freely opened its pages to its readers. The most significant comments were published in the December 1985 and the June 1986 issues.

The incisive criticism offered by Joe E. Crews deserves special mention.⁹⁷ "He [Gulley] not only confuses sin with the effects of sin, but moves into the area of making a sinful nature equivalent to sin itself. . . . Since the fallen nature is the same as guilt and sin, every baby born is in need of redemption before it can think or speak or act. This means that Jesus would be guilty by just being born, unless His nature was different from all other babies."⁹⁸

"In the same way that he confuses sin with the sinful nature, the results of sin with sin itself, and separation from God with the fallen nature, the author [Gulley] confuses evil propensities with natural propensities. He defines evil propensities as 'a leaning to sin.' He writes, '*Evil propensities (a leaning to sin) are acquired in two ways: through sinning and through being born a sinner. Christ did neither.*'"⁹⁹

"I don't know a single person who believes that Jesus sinned or was born a sinner. Neither do I know anyone who believes that Jesus had 'sinful propensities.' But I do know many who believe that He had 'natural propensities,' just as all of us do, as a result of being born like us, with a fallen nature. Evil propensities are those leanings toward sin that have been cultivated and strengthened by indulgence in sin. Natural propensities are those leanings that have been inher-

ited. Guilt is involved in one, but not the other. It is not sinful unless one yields to the propensity.”¹⁰⁰

Another reader, Anibal Rivera, was astonished that anyone would attempt to give credence to the idea that there are two possible points of view in Adventist theology concerning the human nature of Jesus.¹⁰¹ “Our pioneers and the Spirit of Prophecy were not in conflict with respect to the question of the human nature of Christ. It’s as if we as a people have decided to believe that Sundaykeeping and Sabbathkeeping are justified in the eyes of God. Obviously, there has been a change in our historic position.”¹⁰²

Some readers were simply amazed that *Ministry* would publish pro and con articles on a doctrine well established in the Seventh-day Adventist church.¹⁰³ For example, the forceful comment of R.R.D. Marks, an Australian teacher: “Our Sabbath school quarterlies for more than a quarter of a century before Ellen G. White died emphasized that Christ took our fallen nature, and although she studied them, as she advised others to do, she never spoke out against their emphatic teaching on the subject. Note the quarterly for the second quarter, 1909, page 8: ‘The divine seed could manifest the glory of God in sinful flesh, even to absolute and perfect victory over any tendency in the flesh.’”¹⁰⁴

A California reader, Ethel Wildes, advanced a unique argument: “If Christ had come in the nature of Adam before the Fall, man would have fled from His presence. Sin robbed Adam of his glory, and he knew that he was naked. Moses’ face glowed with a tiny portion of the purity and glory of God, and the people were afraid. He had to veil his face. When Jesus comes in His glory, which was veiled in humanity when He walked among men, many will call for the rocks and mountains to hide them from Him. That glory will destroy the wicked. God dwelt in a nature like mine and withstood every temptation. He can do the same for me by dwelling in my heart by His Spirit. Bless His holy name.”¹⁰⁵

An Alternate View From Thomas A. Davis

In the same *Ministry* Thomas A. Davis presented an alternative proposal on the human nature of Christ as contained in his book

*Was Jesus Really Like Us?*¹⁰⁶ He believed that his point of view could serve as a bridge between the interpretations of Douglass and Gulley and resolve adequately the problems raised by both.

Davis wrote: "We read in Hebrews 2:17 that Jesus was 'made like his *brethren* [the born-again, sanctified ones] in every respect.' I suggest it is not doing harm to syntax to make this connection, and furthermore, we are simply applying the rule of first mention. This is merely the commonsense assumption that a stated or implied meaning given a word the first time it is used in a passage is the meaning to be maintained throughout the passage, unless otherwise indicated.

"In light of the foregoing we may conclude that there was something important about the incarnate nature of Christ that was like born-again people but unlike unregenerate people. I suggest that in this idea is a concept that could bring together the two viewpoints discussed in *Ministry*."¹⁰⁷

Davis concluded, "Jesus, then, became man with a fully human nature (while also being fully God). Thus, of the flesh, He had the weakness of humanity, torn by temptations as we are, with the possibility of sinning. But in that condition He had an unfallen mind, heart, and will, and was totally and continually attuned to the Father and directed by the Holy Spirit. In this way He was like the unfallen Adam. And it is at this point that, I believe, the regenerate and Jesus meet on common ground."¹⁰⁸

This interpretation seems attractive. However, in the context of the second chapter of the Epistle to Hebrews, it is questionable whether the word "brothers" applies strictly to the regenerate. Moreover, the comparison made between Jesus and "His brothers" is intended not to compare their spiritual likeness but to underscore the natural likeness of their "blood and flesh" shared with Christ. "The children" (verse 14), here mentioned "all of one" (verse 11) origin, are all those for whom Jesus has suffered death (verse 9). "For which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (verse 11).

References and Notes

¹ See our chapter 12.

² Robert J. Wieland, *How Could Christ Be Sinless as a Baby?* (Chula Vista, Calif.: 1977).

³ ———, *Answers to Some Questions* (Chula Vista, Calif.: 1979).

⁴ ———, *The Broken Link* (Kendu Bay, Kenya: Africa Herald Publishing House, 1981). This book was also printed in Australia by Elijah Press. This study had already been the object of a brochure published in 1975, at the time when the committee on righteousness by faith was held at Palmdale.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-11.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-14.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-16.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-19.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 33, 34.

¹³ ———, *Gold Tried in the Fire* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1983).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

¹⁷ Norman R. Gulley, *Christ Our Substitute* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1982).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹⁹ ———, in *Adventist Review*, June 30, 1983.

²⁰ Donald K. Short to William G. Johnsson (editor of the *Adventist Review*) July 4, 1983. Quoted in Bruno W. Steinweg, *The Doctrine of the Human Nature of Christ*, p. 21.

²¹ Herbert E. Douglass, in *Adventist Review*, Dec. 22 and 29, 1983.

²² ———, in *Adventist Review*, Dec. 29, 1983.

²³ *The Voice of Present Truth* (Platina, Calif.: review published by Unwalled Village Publishers, 1983), p. 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 19.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

²⁷ Herbert E. Douglass, in *The Voice of Present Truth*, p. 1.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1, 2.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2. (Italics supplied.)

³⁰ Dennis E. Priebe, in *The Voice of Present Truth*, p. 12.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 14, 15.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ ———, *Face to Face With the Real Gospel* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1985).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁴² Eric Claude Webster, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology*.

⁴³ Webster was born on August 26, 1927, in South Africa. After finishing his theological studies at Helderberg College, near Cape Town, he received a Master of Divinity from Andrews University. Since 1948 he has ministered in the Adventist Church in various capacities.

⁴⁴ ———, *Crosscurrents in Adventist Christology*, p. 156. The expression “innocent infirmities” has to be attributed to Henry Melvill. See our chapter 14.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 450–452. See suggested propositions made by Webster in his conclusion, pp. 450–452.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 451, propositions 8 and 9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, proposition 10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, proposition 11.

⁴⁹ Robert J. Spangler, in *Ministry*, June 1985, p. 24.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Norman R. Gulley made a study of the Ellen G. White texts in the *Adventist Review*, June 30, 1983.

⁵⁴ ———, in *Ministry*, June 1985.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ See *Ministry*, April 1957; *Questions on Doctrine*, Appendix B, pp. 647–660.

⁶⁵ Herbert E. Douglass, in *Ministry*, June 1985.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* The quotation is from C.E.B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. T. Clark, Ltd., 1980), vol. 1, p. 379.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ *Ministry*, August 1985.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Joe E. Crews, in *Ministry*, December 1985.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Anibal Rivera, in *Ministry*, December 1985.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ R.R.D. Marks, in *Ministry*, June 1986.

¹⁰⁵ Ethel Wildes, in *Ministry*, June 1986.

¹⁰⁶ See our chapter 12.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas A. Davis, in *Ministry*, June 1986.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

IN SEARCH OF HISTORICAL TRUTH

It is quite obvious that there cannot be two incongruous truths about Christ's human nature. Yet some attempt to harmonize both positions as if the differences were of little importance. Still others suggest that the two points of view actually enhance each other.

Regardless of merit, it seems that attempts at reconciliation often promise little chance of success. On the contrary, the strong reactions by members of the church, and the ever-more-pointed critiques by some theologians, show that the controversy is far from over. However, the period from 1986 to 1994 appears to mark a certain revival of the traditional Christology.

If it is true that a large number of Adventists today do not know the historical position of the church on this issue, it is also true that recent studies by contemporary researchers are now available to remind them.

A Century of Adventist Christology

The first study, published in 1986, was that of Ralph Larson: *The Word Was Made Flesh: One Hundred Years of Adventist Christology, 1852-1952*.¹ This book is clearly the most complete work on the subject from a purely historical point of view.

Ralph Larson studied theology at Andrews University, then obtained his doctorate at the Andover-Newton Seminary in Boston. For 40 years he served the Adventist Church, as pastor, evangelist, departmental secretary, missionary, and professor of theology. His

last position before retiring was that of president of the theological seminary in the Philippines.

For many years Larson systematically analyzed the official literature of the church between 1852 and 1952, collecting carefully the statements bearing on Christology. Thus he was able to index some 1,200 quotations, of which more than 400 came from Ellen White's pen, arranged in chronological sequence. By doing so, Larson hoped to provide verification for what had been the Adventist belief about Christ's human nature between 1852 and 1952.

Larson's aim was not to make a scriptural or theological study, but simply "to establish *what* Seventh-day Adventists have believed, not *why* they have believed it."² More important, he wanted all to be aware of the main question and subject of the controversy: "Did the incarnate Christ come to earth in the human nature of the unfallen Adam, or in the human nature of fallen man?"³

First, Larson attempted to clearly define the key expressions used by the pioneers, particularly those used by Ellen White, such as "sinful nature," "fallen nature," "inherited sinful nature," etc.,⁴ and to clarify the words "passion" and "propensity" depending upon whether they are attributed to Christ or kept separate from His nature.⁵ Finally, he attempted to place certain statements contained in Ellen White's letter to W.H.L. Baker in their literary and historical context.⁶

Based on his collection of quotations, Larson sees an "epoch of clarity," during which "the church speaks with a single voice" (1852-1952), after which comes "the epoch of confusion" (section 4), from 1952 onward. The last three sections are dedicated to emphasizing the close connection between Christology and soteriology.⁷

It goes without saying that Larson did not come down gently on the new theology.⁸ He considered that its promotion in *Ministry*, *Questions on Doctrine*, and *Movement of Destiny* had an "incalculable" degree of influence, bringing confusion among Adventists the world over. It made it appear that Ellen White had spoken in contradictory terms, and that historical Adventism had been mistaken on the doctrine of salvation. Larson proclaimed his belief that "Christology, the nature of Christ, and soteriology, the saving work of Christ, are inseparably and intimately linked together. When we speak of one,

we unavoidably speak of the other. When we change one, we inevitably change the other.”⁹

Larson’s work provides an unprecedented source of information. His historical and critical analysis is enlightening to anyone who wishes to be informed regarding the unanimous teaching of the church from 1852 to 1952 and the change that took place in the 1950s.

In conclusion, Larson invited his readers to verify the results of his research, and not simply accept or reject it without personal study. If errors of interpretation had been made, he felt that the church should have the courage to admit and correct them.¹⁰

The Ellen G. White Estate Is Requested to Take a Stand

As a member of the Ellen G. White Estate Board of Trustees,¹¹ I could not remain indifferent to the developing controversy, particularly since its origins were founded on the many statements of Ellen White regarding Christ’s human nature. I believed that the Ellen G. White Estate, commissioned to care for Ellen White’s writings, should clearly speak out, as it had done on many other occasions.¹²

In September 1985 I accepted an invitation to teach a course in Christology at the Adventist faculty of theology in France. It appeared imperative to update my students about the controversy in the English-speaking part of the Adventist world. For their benefit I prepared a manual, which was the first draft of a history of Adventist Christology in the French language.¹³

This was a unique opportunity for me to assess the magnitude of the problem and to nurture hope for a solution. I felt that the Ellen G. White Estate should discuss the matter and declare itself in regard to Ellen White’s Christology. I suggested to its president, Kenneth H. Wood, that the item should be added to the agenda of its annual consultation.¹⁴

My letter of July 9, 1986, was not a suggestion to attempt a new exegesis of Ellen White statements or to formulate a criticism of one or the other of the theses in vogue. I proposed, rather, to take a closer look at Ellen White’s own position as well as her evaluation of the teaching of her contemporaries on the subject: Waggoner, Jones, Prescott, and Haskell, whose position she approved.

By return mail Kenneth Wood advised me that he agreed with my recommendation and that the item would be on the agenda of Consultation IV. At the same time, however, Robert W. Olson, secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, informed me that this was not a question that the White Estate should attempt to resolve.

"The White Estate has never issued a paper on Christology. I suppose one reason is that we do not agree among ourselves on the final conclusion. . . . Considering the fact that there are at least two different schools of thought among us, I have felt that it might not be wise for the White Estate to try to decide who is right and who wrong. Once we do this, we place ourselves in a confrontational position with all those that disagree with us."¹⁵

However, while favorable to the idea of a discussion at Consultation IV, Robert Olson wished to have the two points of view represented. He himself proposed the presentation of a paper in which he would express his own point of view. Without waiting for a reply, he sent me a summary of its content in two letters, which I received in April and September 1986.

Robert Olson's Point of View

In his letter of April 21, 1986, Robert Olson summarized, for my benefit, his understanding of the problem. "My personal view on the key aspect of this entire question is that Christ did not have inherited tendencies to sin Himself, but as my substitute He was able to experience all of my feelings so that He understands fully the nature of my temptations."¹⁶

"Personally, I feel that Christ was different from the rest of us at birth. Luke 1:35 settles that for me. He was holy when He was born; on the other hand, I was unholy when I was born. Christ never needed conversion, but the rest of us do. I know the subject is full of many mysteries that are really incomprehensible to us. I do believe, however, that if He was able to take my sins upon Him and experience the sensations of the lost soul on the cross, that it was possible for Him to experience my natural bent to evil without having taken that bent Himself."¹⁷

In his second letter of September 3, 1986, Olson once again

went to the heart of the problem: "I am thinking in particular of the question as to whether Jesus inherited sinful tendencies from His mother. Elder Wood feels He did have these sinful tendencies; my opinion is that He did not, but that on certain occasions in His life He did experience vicariously what it was to have sinful tendencies. In other words, I believe that He accepted at times my sinful tendencies vicariously in the same way that He accepted my guilt vicariously. If I can explain one, I can explain the other. It may be that we are talking about something here that is inexplicable."¹⁸

Olson publicized his view during a seminar held at Andrews University from July 14 to 24, 1986. After the two contradictory articles published in *Ministry* in June 1985, and the criticism they triggered, the subject of Christ's human nature had become a burning question. In response, Olson prepared a three-page syllabus comprising questions answered simply by the use of texts from the New Testament and from the writings of Ellen White.

In 1989 Olson published a more elaborate brochure, *The Humanity of Christ*,¹⁹ in the same format as the syllabus. "The purpose of this little book," he wrote, "is to present an accurate picture of our Lord in His humanity. Since Ellen G. White knew Jesus so well and since she even conversed with Him in vision, . . . we have quoted heavily, but far from exhaustively, from her writings, as well as from the Holy Scriptures."²⁰

Because this compilation was made in the name of the Ellen G. White Estate, its secretary attempted to remain as neutral as possible. This brochure constitutes an excellent source for anyone wishing to know Ellen White's answers to Robert Olson's questions. However, since anyone is at liberty to interpret at will the quotations provided as answers, the problem remains.

Christology Discussed at the Ellen G. White Estate

Consultation IV was to have been held in Williamsburg, Virginia, from January 23 to 25, 1987. Because of an unusual snowstorm that paralyzed all traffic on the east coast of the United States, the meeting was held in Columbia, Maryland. Further, it was shortened to only one day, Sabbath, January 24. The entire session was

devoted to the problem of Christ's human nature, based on my presentation, the only one that could be presented.

The content of that presentation was essentially that of the second part of this study, devoted to the Christology of the pioneers.²¹ It also contained a criticism of the new theology, which will be discussed in more detail in the fifth part of this book.²²

Other papers had been prepared but could not be presented for lack of time. However, the texts were included in the voluminous record of Consultation IV. Two of them in particular have a direct bearing on our subject and deserve consideration.²³

Tim Poirier and the Sources of Ellen White's Christology

Tim Poirier, associate secretary and archivist of the Ellen G. White Estate, prepared a comparative study between Ellen White's Christology and that of authors whose language she had apparently borrowed. According to Poirier, these sources would be helpful in clarifying Ellen White's Christology.²⁴

Henry Melvill (1798-1871), an Anglican preacher, was one of the sources from whom Ellen White borrowed to write her article entitled "Christ, Man's Example," published in the *Review and Herald*, of July 5, 1887. The White Estate retains Ellen White's personal copy of the *Sermons of Melvill*.²⁵ Poirier found Melvill's sermon "The Humiliation of the Man Christ Jesus" of particular value in clarifying the meaning of some of Ellen White's expressions regarding Christ's humanity.

According to Melvill, Adam's fall had two fundamental consequences: (1) "innocent infirmities"²⁶ and (2) "sinful propensities." By "innocent infirmities" Melvill included hunger, suffering, weakness, sorrows, death. By "sinful propensity" he understood "tendency to sin." At the close of his argument Melvill concluded: "Before the Fall Adam had neither 'innocent infirmities' nor 'sinful propensities'; we are born with both, and Christ took the first but not the second."²⁷

Hence "Christ's humanity was not Adamic humanity, that is, the humanity of Adam before the fall; nor fallen humanity, that is, in every respect the humanity of Adam after the fall. It was not the

Adamic, because it had the innocent infirmities of the fallen. It was not the fallen, because it never descended into moral impurity. It was, therefore, most literally our humanity, but without sin.”²⁸

Poirier also compared Ellen White’s language with that of Octavius Winslow²⁹ to show that both used the words *propensity*, *handicap*, and *tendency* in the same sense and in agreement with Melvill. Poirier placed Ellen White passages alongside passages from Winslow’s *Christology*³⁰ in which she had plainly borrowed words, expressions, and even concepts.

But does this mean that Ellen White had an identical point of view? A careful examination of the evidence allows us to conclude otherwise. In his argument Winslow reached the conclusion that in Christ’s human nature “there was no appeal to the existence of any corrupt principles or propensities; no working upon any fallen desires and tendencies in his nature; for, until the moment that the blast swept him to the earth, no angel in heaven stood before the throne purer or more faultless than he (*The Glory of the Redeemer*, pp. 129, 132-134).”³¹

In the comparative extract presented by Poirier, Ellen White employed essentially the same language, but applied it to Adam before the Fall and not to Christ. “There were no corrupt principles in the first Adam, no corrupt propensities or tendencies to evil. Adam was as faultless as the angels before God’s throne.”³² And in the preceding quotation, also placed in parallel with Winslow’s text, Ellen White wrote on the subject of Jesus: “Here the test to Christ was far greater than that of Adam and Eve, for Christ took our nature, fallen but not corrupt, and would not be corrupted unless He received the words of Satan in the place of the words of God.”³³

It is true that Ellen White used the words and expressions of other theologians. But that does not necessarily imply that she used them to say the same thing. So, for example, Winslow affirmed that “our Lord’s exposure to temptation and His consequent capacity of not yielding to its solicitations, has its foundation in His *perfect humanity*.”³⁴ Ellen White used the same expression this way: “Christ’s perfect humanity is the same that man may have through connection with Christ.”³⁵ In other words, while Winslow applies the expres-

sion to the human nature Christ inherited from birth, Ellen White says we can have the same “perfect humanity” that He had.

In regard to Melville’s argument that Christ had only “innocent infirmities,” it is important to point out that a search of the Ellen G. White CD-ROM indicates that she never employed that expression. Certainly, she did make multiple mentions of the “infirmities” borne by Christ, but never qualified them as “innocent.” On the contrary, she says repeatedly that “Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity.”³⁶ Or that “Christ bore the sins and infirmities of the race as they existed when He came to the earth to help man.”³⁷ Thus it is not enough to compare words and expressions; the use that is made of them must also be verified.

D. A. Delafield Confirms Ellen White’s Christology

The third paper contained in the record of Consultation IV was from the pen of D. A. Delafield, one of the veterans of the Ellen G. White Estate. As associate secretary he was known worldwide for having held seminars on the Spirit of Prophecy and by his numerous articles touching various aspects of Ellen White’s writings. In Europe he and his wife are especially remembered because of the year they spent teaching churches about the gift of prophecy, and because of his book dealing with Ellen White’s visits in the different countries of Europe.³⁸

The study prepared for Williamsburg bore the following title: *The Credentials of the True Prophet*. Among the credentials of the true prophet, Delafield quoted the verses of 1 John 4:1–3, which he considered to be the seal of the Christian witness. According to Delafield, Ellen White made of Christology her permanent subject, as indicated by the *Index to the Writings of Ellen G. White*. “Under the word ‘Christ’ are 87 pages of references, all devoted to Christ as incarnate, and sinless, and who died for men’s sins.”³⁹

Delafield wrote: “Whenever we study the subject of the Incarnation, we should keep in mind our central fact: namely, Jesus lived victoriously in true human flesh—flesh that was fallen, but not corrupt.”⁴⁰ Then, relying on an Ellen White statement, he specified: “Our Lord was tempted as man is tempted. He was capable of yield-

ing to temptations, as are human beings. . . . Here, the test to Christ was far greater than that of Adam and Eve, for Christ took our nature, *fallen* but not corrupted, and would not be corrupted unless He received the words of Satan in the place of the words of God.”⁴¹

Delafield underscored the fact that Christ was “fallen but not corrupted” by citing the Baker letter: “‘Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ, or that He in any way yielded to corruption. . . . Let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be’ (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 1128, 1129).”⁴²

For Delafield, “Jesus accomplished what no other human being had done before Him: to live a life without sin and without stain, uncorrupted in His human flesh. . . . Even His enemies recognized His innocence. Pilate (Luke 23:14), his wife (Matt. 27:19), and demons also (Mark 1:24) declared Him ‘the Holy One of God.’”⁴³

Delafield concluded with a quotation from Ellen White: “‘He met all temptations by which Adam was assailed, and overcame these temptations because in His humanity He relied upon divine power. . . . Christ’s life is a revelation of what fallen human beings may become through union and fellowship with the divine nature’ (*The Faith I Live By*, p. 219).”⁴⁴ Delafield expressed his conviction that this was the Christology of the pioneers of the Adventist Church.

George R. Knight Confirms the Christology of the Pioneers

Among statements on the subject of the history of Adventist Christology, those of George R. Knight are especially valuable. Professor of church history at Andrews University, Michigan, Knight is clearly in a position to give an objective opinion about the Adventist belief about Christ’s human nature from the birth of the movement. Most of his books are devoted to various aspects of the history of the Adventist Church.⁴⁵

The work that led him to write about Christ’s human nature was that arising out of the case of A. T. Jones. A complete chapter is devoted to the detailed analysis of Jones’s teaching as to Christ’s nature.⁴⁶ But of particular interest here are Knight’s remarks on the

history of Adventist Christology in general. He confirmed that “Waggoner, Jones, and Prescott . . . would develop the concept that Christ was just like every other child of Adam—including a tendency to sin—into a central feature of their doctrine of righteousness by faith.”⁴⁷

But, he observed, “their view of Christ’s nature created no controversy in the Adventism of the 1890s. It was a generally accepted theological nonissue. That would all change in the 1950s when it would become *the* theological subject for many Adventists on both sides of the question.”⁴⁸

“M. L. Andreasen, one of the denomination’s foremost theologians in the 1950s, held that the doctrine of Christ’s ‘sinful’ nature is one of Adventism’s ‘foundation pillars.’ To change that position, he suggested, was not only to give up historic Adventism, but to surrender belief in the testimonies of Ellen White. Many have followed his lead. Others in the church believe that an adequate Christian belief in Christ must recognize that He was different from other humans in His tendencies toward sin. For 30 years Adventism has experienced a war of words over the topic.”⁴⁹

“The nature of Christ did not become a divisive issue in Adventist circles until the 1950s. Up through that time the denomination’s writers had been fairly well in harmony with Jones, Waggoner, and Prescott that Christ had come in human flesh that had, like the fallen Adam’s, all of mankind’s tendencies to sin.”⁵⁰

According to Knight, two factors motivated the theological change in the 1950s. One was the discovery in 1955 of Ellen White’s letter to W.L.H. Baker. Another was the sensitivity of certain leaders of the church “to the criticisms of certain evangelicals that the Adventists’ ‘sinful tendencies’ Christology was less than adequate.”⁵¹

However, said Knight, there were plenty of Ellen White statements on the other side of the ledger affirming that Christ “took upon Him our sinful nature,” or even that “He took upon Himself fallen, suffering human nature, degraded and defiled by sin.” And to add: “Those were not isolated statements.” In the same year as the letter to Baker, she wrote that “Christ took on fallen human nature.”⁵²

Knight finally stated, “There is not the slightest doubt that Ellen

White believed that Christ took upon Himself fallen, sinful human nature at the Incarnation. Whatever that consisted of, however, it is clear that it did not include any evil propensities to sin—those ‘thistles and briars’ of selfishness, self-love, and so on.”⁵³

It is not easy to ascertain Knight’s personal point of view on the subject. His objective analysis as historian confirms, however, what the supporters of the historical Christology have always asserted. The aim of his book was not to say what he himself believed but to affirm what Adventists had believed at first and then to explain how the radical change in their Christology came about in the 1950s.

A Biblical Exposition in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* . . .

During the General Conference session of 1980 a new statement of beliefs was prepared. Several times since the first declaration of faith in 1872 Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders realized the need of restating their fundamental beliefs in order to make them even more clear. To this end, the General Conference Ministerial Association assumed the initiative of making “a biblical exposition of the 27 fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventists”⁵⁴ in a book that came out in 1988 and was translated and distributed into many of the leading languages of the world.

Various authors were chosen to prepare articles, while a committee of 194 individuals, chosen from the 10 world divisions, were commissioned to critique each chapter. A smaller committee of 27 church leaders, theologians, and pastors met regularly to supervise the preparation of this book.⁵⁵

Although the book might have appeared to be an official declaration, the editors took care to emphasize: “While this volume is not an officially voted statement—only a General Conference in world session could provide that—it may be viewed as representative of ‘the truth . . . in Jesus’ (Eph. 4:21) that Seventh-day Adventists around the globe cherish and proclaim.”⁵⁶

Because of differences of opinion, the declaration voted at the 1980 General Conference session avoided defining Christ’s human nature in a precise manner. It merely affirmed that Jesus was “forever truly God” and “truly man.” “He was conceived of the Holy

Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God.”⁵⁷

The related section found in chapter 4 of *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, however, did not lack for precise details on the various aspects of Christology. In particular, Christ’s human nature was developed here in a systematic manner from biblical texts. Jesus was presented as “truly man.”⁵⁸ “He could claim true humanity through His mother”; “throughout His boyhood He was subject to His parents (Luke 2:51)”; “the name Son of man emphasizes His solidarity with the human race through His Incarnation.”⁵⁹

The controversial question was clearly addressed: “To what extent did He [Christ] identify with or become identical to fallen humanity? A correct view of the expression ‘the likeness of sinful flesh,’ or sinful man, is crucial. Inaccurate views have brought discussion and strife throughout the history of the Christian church.”⁶⁰

The chapter used the typical expressions of the traditional teaching of the Adventist Church: “He clothed His divinity with humanity, He was made in the ‘likeness of sinful flesh,’ or ‘sinful human nature,’ or ‘fallen human nature’ (cf. Rom. 8:3). This in no way indicates that Jesus Christ was sinful, or participated in sinful acts or thoughts. Though made in the form or likeness of sinful flesh, He was sinless and His sinlessness is beyond questioning.”⁶¹

The human nature of Jesus was not identified with that of Adam before the Fall. “Christ took a human nature that, compared with Adam’s unfallen nature, had decreased in physical and mental strength—though He did so without sinning. When Christ took the human nature that bore the consequences of sin, He became subject to the infirmities and weaknesses that all experience. His human nature was ‘beset by weakness’ or ‘compassed with infirmity’ (Heb. 5:2, KJV; Matt. 8:17; Isa. 53:4).”⁶²

In reference to the statement of the Anglican bishop Henry Melvill, it was stated: “Christ’s humanity was not the Adamic humanity, that is, the humanity of Adam before the fall; nor fallen humanity, that is, in every respect the humanity of Adam after the fall. It was not the Adamic, because it had the innocent infirmities of the

fallen. It was not the fallen, because it had never descended into moral impurity. It was, therefore, most literally our humanity, but without sin.”⁶³

Finally, concerning the problem of temptation, “the way He experienced temptations proves that He was truly human. That Christ was ‘in all points tempted like as we are’ (Heb. 4:15, KJV), shows that He was a partaker of human nature. Temptation and the possibility of sinning were real to Christ. If He could not sin He would have been neither human nor our example. Christ took human nature with all its liabilities, including the possibility of yielding to temptation.”⁶⁴

To underline the reality of the temptations to which Christ was subjected, two well-known theologians were cited. “We agree with Philip Schaff, who said, ‘Had He [Christ] been endowed from the start with *absolute* impeccability, or with the impossibility of sinning, He could not be a true man, nor our model for imitation: His holiness, instead of being his own self-acquired act and inherent merit, would be an accidental or outward gift and His temptations an unreal show.’ Karl Ullmann adds, ‘The history of the temptation, however it may be explained, would have no significance; and the expression in the Epistle to the Hebrews “he was tempted in all points as we,” would be without meaning.’”⁶⁵

Following these statements, one can only be astonished to read that “Christ’s human nature was portrayed as sinless”; that “Jesus Christ took upon Himself our nature with all its liabilities, but He was free from hereditary corruption or depravity and actual sin.” Or again, that “Jesus had no evil propensities or inclinations or even sinful passions.”⁶⁶

Certainly Jesus had nothing of the sort. He gives us “the example of a sinless life.”⁶⁷ But this was accomplished in “man’s fallen nature”⁶⁸ subject to the “working of the great law of heredity.”⁶⁹ Even if He did not have evil inclinations, “He knows how strong are the inclinations of the natural heart.”⁷⁰ And why speak, with Melvill, of “innocent infirmities” when Ellen White declares that “Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity”?⁷¹

At any rate, in other respects the Christology presented in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* confirmed the post-Fall position.

However, by limiting Christ's heredity only to physical consequences—to the “innocent infirmities”⁷²—the authors moved away from the traditional position on a very important point. By doing this, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* established a mediating interpretation of Christ's human nature, which Roy Adams attempted to propagate by means of his articles in the *Adventist Review* and his book *The Nature of Christ: Help for a Church Divided Over Perfection*.

Roy Adams Seeks to Revive the Debate

After the debates of the eighties, the *Adventist Review* published a series of six articles from the pen of Norman R. Gulley under titles such as “Model or Substitute, Does It Matter How We See Jesus?” and “Pressing Together.” These articles included concepts that are clearly his own, such as “Jesus became sin for us vicariously”; “Jesus did not experience temptations like ours because His nature was unlike ours”; and Ellen White “saw Christ's mission in two dimensions. She speaks of a pre-Fall and a post-Fall dimension.”⁷³

In the spring of 1990 Roy Adams, a *Review* associate editor, renewed the debate by publishing three editorials on the current problem of knowing if Christ was like Adam (before the Fall) or like sinners, entitled “Like Adam or like Us?”⁷⁴ “When we want a deep problem to study,” Adams quoted Ellen White, “let us fix our minds on the most marvelous thing that ever took place on earth or heaven—the Incarnation of the Son of God.”⁷⁵ “This is the central doctrine of the Christian faith. Without it,” Adams declares, “the whole canon of Scripture becomes a meaningless document, a *non-sense*.”⁷⁶

“The problem we face here is similar to that which confronted our Christian pioneers in the early centuries—the lack of any definitive statement in Scripture. This is the reason that Adventists have leaned so heavily on the writings of Ellen G. White on this question.”⁷⁷

Adams showed that Ellen White strongly affirmed on one hand that Christ was in all things like us, and on the other, that He was at the same time “different from us.” The difficulty lay in this apparent contradiction. “If Christ did in fact become human, how was He able to bypass the universal infection of sin?”⁷⁸

To explain this paradox Adams called upon Henry Melvill, the

Anglican minister who affirmed that the two essential results of the fall were (1) “innocent infirmities” and (2) “sinful propensities.” Now, according to Melvill, “before the fall Adam had neither ‘innocent infirmities,’ nor ‘sinful propensities.’ We are born with both, and . . . Christ took the first but not the second.”⁷⁹ Adams concluded, as Melvill did, that “the incarnate Christ was neither just like Adam before the Fall, nor just like us. He was unique.”⁸⁰

This is the solution suggested by Adams in his 1994 book on the nature of Christ.⁸¹ Having criticized the Christology of some “rebel brethren” of the heritage of Jones and Waggoner, as well as of the sharp reaction of Andreasen against the new theology,⁸² he developed the ideas contained in his editorials.⁸³ In particular, he restated in detail Melvill’s explanation. And, like Tim Poirier, he considered that Ellen White, having used the same expressions, must have given them the same meaning.⁸⁴

Like others before him, Adams justified his point of view by quoting extensively from Ellen White’s letter to Baker. Further, he indicated that his interpretation corresponds with that of his semi-nary teachers.⁸⁵

We recognize that Roy Adams’ interpretation represents fairly the position held by a large proportion of Adventists today. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that this point of view is shared by the majority in the worldwide Adventist Church.

The European Situation

As we have shown,⁸⁶ up to the 1950s the Adventist Christology in the countries of the Southern European Division was in line with the teachings of the church at large. Since then, despite the importance given to the problem of Christ’s human nature in the literature of English-speaking Adventists, no controversy had yet surfaced on that side of the Atlantic. Apart from a few specialists, not many Adventists indulged in the reading of theology books in English. Furthermore, specialists who took an interest in the subtleties of the problem in question were even more scarce. In 1969 the editor of the *Revue Adventiste*, Jean Caseaux, was first to make known elements of the new theology.⁸⁷

Alfred Vaucher, the father of French-speaking Adventist theologians,⁸⁸ likewise devoted an article on “The twofold divine-human nature of Christ,” in which he analyzed the various trends of thought in the Adventist Church.⁸⁹ The only personal remark expressed in this article concerned the word “likeness,” which for him was not “synonymous with identity.” “And if one held that Jesus assumed a sinful nature, that signified uniquely that He accepted the reality of temptation and the possibility of sinning.”⁹⁰ The question of knowing whether Christ had the nature of Adam before or after the Fall did not seem to be of concern to Alfred Vaucher. Even in his masterly works *Histoire du Salut (History of Salvation)*, he was content to affirm the mere reality of His humanity and of His temptations.⁹¹

It is difficult to determine exactly when the new theology became known to pastors and church members in Europe.⁹² In the teaching given at the Adventist Seminary of Collonges, where pastors of many countries are trained,⁹³ the two trains of thought were presented by teachers who came in succession: Raoul Dederen until he left for Andrews University in 1963; Georges Stéveny from 1967 to 1980; and I, from 1960 to 1970 and from 1985 to 1998.

When he was contacted recently, Raoul Dederen assured me that his point of view on Christ’s human nature was, in substance, exactly the same as that expressed by Edward Heppenstall. In other words, Christ took Adam’s nature after the Fall, but without the participation of the natural tendencies to sin—a flesh like that of sin, but not identical.⁹⁴ As to Georges Stéveny’s point of view, we now have it in writing and in great detail, thanks to his recent book: *A la découverte du Christ (Seeking the Discovery of Christ)*.⁹⁵

Georges Stéveny in the Wake of the Pioneers

Georges Stéveny studied theology at the Adventist Seminary of Collonges-sous-Salève and received a postgraduate diploma in philosophy from the University of Geneva. After several years of teaching, he served the Adventist Church for 18 years as a pastor-evangelist in France and Belgium. A brilliant speaker, he captivated large audiences at times with his philosophical and biblical topics. Called upon to become a theology professor at the Adventist

Seminary of Collonges-sous-Salève in 1967, he was later entrusted with the leadership of the seminary from 1970 to 1980. He continued his ministry as president of the Swiss French Conference and as general secretary of the Euro-Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists from 1985 to 1990.

Although he had written many articles and helped in the editing of several published works, he had to wait until his retirement to put in writing his work *A la découverte du Christ*, representing the harvest of knowledge and spiritual contemplations of his entire life. These were presented in the form of a Christology on two levels. First as a “lower Christology,” rooted in history enabling us to discover Christ in the life He lived on earth. Then, on a second level, a “higher Christology,” which was the revelation of the Christ of our faith. This portion of his work is of particular interest because it deals directly with the Incarnation, its implications and consequences.⁹⁶

The method followed is a presentation of systematic exegesis for each Christological text, beginning with the *Prologue* of John’s Gospel, followed by the key passages of Paul’s epistles. It is a Christology based entirely on the study of the biblical revelation. The study takes the reader through a demonstration that “Jesus was God before His Incarnation” and that “He remained God inevitably up to His humiliation.”⁹⁷ “But in Christ, God Himself came to dwell with us. He was made man, a second and last Adam. One question therefore arises, doubtless delicate, but legitimate: How far did the identification Jesus with us really go? Did He take Adam’s nature before the fall or Adam’s nature after the fall?”⁹⁸

Georges Stéveny rejected categorically the notion that Christ had a nature like that of Adam before the Fall. The Pauline expression “in the likeness [or similitude] of sinful flesh” could not be attributed to Adam before the Fall. But “it is not sufficient to denounce the difference between two situations, those experienced by the two Adams—that is quite obvious. What we must recognize as well is that they did not live in the same flesh, nor in the same nature.”⁹⁹

“To say that Jesus lived in a flesh like that of Adam before the fall is therefore not in agreement with the divine revelation. But it would be another mistake to imply that He was identical with that of Adam

after the fall. We tie ourselves up in false alternatives by wanting to define the nature of Jesus simply in relation to Adam, before or after the fall. An enormous, essential difference separates Jesus from man, who became a sinner separated from God ontologically.”¹⁰⁰ “Jesus was not only God; He was not only man. He occupies a different place, a new position, at the beginning of a new era.”¹⁰¹

But then, “what exactly is the flesh of Christ and His inner inclinations? How far does His identification with us extend?”¹⁰² To renew the human state, He had to take it entirely. A purely external resemblance is not in harmony with Paul’s declaration that God had sent His Son in “the likeness of sinful flesh” (Rom. 8:3, KJV). “It was in the flesh that God condemned sin by Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul’s demonstration is valuable only as to a formal condition, to know that Jesus resisted under the same conditions as ours. Failure to admit this means that all reasoning is faulted and the conclusion unacceptable: ‘in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit’ (Rom. 8:4).”¹⁰³

“If Jesus had not faced temptation under the same condition as us,” Stéveny asserted, “the struggle would be unequal and His example inadequate.”¹⁰⁴ But the power of the Spirit, through whom Christ condemned sin in the flesh, is offered to all who receive Him by faith. Hence, “thanks to Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit works in our behalf the same ministry that He fulfilled on behalf of the Son of God. Therein lies an essential aspect of the Gospel. . . . How comforting it is to know that humanity, compromised by Adam its leader, can be regenerated by Jesus Christ in whom all things are made new.”¹⁰⁵

William G. Johnsson Attempts Harmony

In a series of five editorials published in the *Adventist Review*, William G. Johnsson, chief editor, attempted to calm the debate over Christ’s human nature in his articles “Our Matchless Saviour.”¹⁰⁶ “My purpose in these editorials isn’t to try to prove that one side is ‘right’ and the other ‘wrong.’ I hope to draw us all together by presenting the concerns of each camp fairly, and showing

how much we hold in common after all. . . . I don't expect to change every mind; I aim to appeal to the wisdom and common sense of our people, in whom I have great confidence."¹⁰⁷

Having pointed out that Adventists confess the complete and eternal divinity of Jesus Christ, Johnsson emphasized the fact that His humanity is equally vital. But precisely there lay the point of debate among contemporary Adventists. Johnsson objectively recapped both points of view, then asked, "What does the Bible tell us about Jesus' humanity?"¹⁰⁸ His response was exactly that given in his book on the Epistle to the Hebrews.¹⁰⁹ "The silence of the New Testament on this specific point of debate is deafening. In my judgment we as a church are wise in our fundamental beliefs not to attempt to define Christ's human nature more closely than Scripture."¹¹⁰

"But what did Ellen White tell us about Jesus?"¹¹¹ Johnsson asked. She emphasized His divinity as much as His humanity, and the miraculous unity of the two. "He experienced sorrow, suffering, and temptation; His tests were real—He risked failure and eternal loss. But throughout He remained perfectly sinless: He is our matchless Saviour."¹¹²

If Ellen White encouraged us to study the humanity of Jesus, she also took pains to remind us to do it with meticulous care: "Be careful, exceedingly careful as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ." But what did she say about whether His nature was that of Adam before or after the Fall? To know this, "we need to note what she did *not* write as well as what she wrote."¹¹³

Ellen White, who made multiple references to the "foundations" or to the "pillars" of the Adventist message, never mentioned Christ's human nature as being one of them. Further, it is easy to find Ellen White statements to sustain either point of view. In fact, Johnsson noted, Ellen White affirmed that "while Jesus became truly human and passed through our experiences, He was unlike us in key respects. He was the God-man; and He did not share our passions, our bent to evil, our propensities to sin. He was like us; yet He was unlike us. Only by holding these two facts in tension can we do justice to her."¹¹⁴

Too often, Johnsson remarked, the arguments do not touch the real problem—the nature of sin. "The issue behind the issue is the

concept of sin. Those who want to understand more clearly Jesus' human nature would get further if they stopped debating whether Jesus came in humanity's pre-Fall or post-Fall nature and spent time looking at what the Bible says about sin itself."¹¹⁵

Johnsson maintained that the Bible did not restrict the definition of sin to the transgression of the law. "In a penetrating analysis, Paul describes sin as a force, an indwelling principle, a state—'sin living in me' (Rom. 7:14-20). So not only are our acts sinful; our very nature is at war with God."¹¹⁶

"Did Jesus have such a nature? No. If He had, He would Himself need a Saviour. He had no propensity to evil, no warping of His moral nature that predisposed Him to temptation. He is the One utterly sinless—in deed, but also in His inner being. He is 'holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners' (Heb. 7:26)."¹¹⁷ "But I need a Saviour who is different, one who is not part of the sin problem, who does not Himself need a Saviour. And my Saviour must not only be free from taint of sin but must be God Himself! Only God can take away my sins."¹¹⁸

Johnsson's attempt to solve the problem is certainly praiseworthy. Without question, the first step toward a solution lies in a biblical definition of the concept of sin. The apparent contradictions between the fallen, suffering, and degraded human nature that Christ assumed and the pure, holy, and sinless nature that everyone attributes to Him will not otherwise find an explanation capable of reconciling the two radically opposite points of view.

However, to achieve this purpose, it is not enough to state what Christ is or is not.¹¹⁹ Every Adventist believes that Jesus was sinless, that He did not have in Him evil propensities, and that He could be our Saviour only in that state. It must still be explained how He could be tempted in all things like us in flesh like unto sinful flesh without committing sin. This is the very essence of the problem. But when the problem is resolved, Christ will appear even more genuinely as our matchless Saviour.

Jack Sequeira and the Problem of Sin

In his book *Beyond Belief*¹²⁰ Jack Sequeira seeks the solution to

the problem of Christ's human nature in the biblical definition of sin. As suggested in the title, the author wishes to lead his readers "beyond belief," toward "the promise, the power and the reality of the everlasting gospel."

Sequeira is more interested in soteriology than in Christology; he seeks to put "the plan of salvation in a new light."¹²¹ But since one cannot speak of the work of Christ without speaking of His person, Sequeira is compelled to take a position on Christ's human nature and the nature of sin. For him, "the gospel is God's solution to the sin problem. So it is important to begin our study of the gospel by first understanding sin. Too often we try to understand the solution God has prepared for us in Christ (the gospel) without first recognizing the full extent of the *problem*. . . . Only when we truly understand our complete sinfulness in both nature and action will we truly understand God's solution. Not until we understand the depraved nature of sin will we lose confidence in self and turn to Christ as our only righteousness. The gospel becomes meaningful, then, only against the background of a full understanding of sin."¹²²

Sequeira then traces the origin and development of sin. "As descendants of Adam and Eve, we are all in slavery to sin. We are born self-centered, and our natural inclination is to want to live independently of God (see John 8:34; Rom. 1:20-23; 6:17)."¹²³ The Old Testament uses up to a dozen different words for sin. But in Psalm 51:2, 3 we find the basic concepts expressed in three key words: *iniquity*, *sin*, and *transgression*: "a. *Iniquity*. This does not primarily refer to an act of sin, but to a condition of sinfulness; by nature, we are spiritually 'bent' (see Ps. 51:5; Isa. 53:6; 64:6). b. *Sin*. Literally, 'to miss the mark.' This refers to our failures to measure up to God's ideal (see Rom. 3:23; 7:15-24; Isa. 1:4-6). c. *Transgression*. This is a deliberate violation of God's law, a willful act of disobedience (see 1 John 3:4; Rom. 7:7-13)."¹²⁴

Commenting on Isaiah 53:6, Sequeira writes: "First, every one of us has gone astray because we have all followed the natural bent to 'our way.' Second, this bent to follow our own way, this self-centeredness, is the iniquity that was laid upon Christ, our Sin Bearer. When He 'condemned sin in the flesh' on the cross (Rom. 8:3), it

was this bent to sin that He condemned.”¹²⁵

God sent His Son in sinful flesh, not to prove to His children that they could likewise obey the law of God, or to serve as an example for them, but to free them from sin. “At the very heart of the doctrine of Christology is the glorious truth that Christ assumed humanity so that He could be the Saviour of the world. Only to those who have first received Him as Saviour does He become an Example.”¹²⁶

Having explained the *why* of the Incarnation, Sequeira also considers the *how*. “*How* did Christ save mankind in His humanity?” Was it *vicariously*, with Christ acting in the place of humankind, or *actually*, that is, with Christ assuming humanity’s fallen nature? Sequeira opts for the latter, rejecting the idea of vicarious substitution, which, he claims, “makes the gospel unethical.” That an innocent man should die in the place of a guilty one is unacceptable. Further, it very easily reduces the gospel to “cheap grace.”¹²⁷

According to Sequeira, “*Christ, in His humanity, saved men and women in actuality—not vicariously*. Those who take this position teach that Christ took the human nature Adam had after his fall. They argue that since Christ came to save fallen humanity, He had to assume the sinful human nature that needed redeeming. By thus identifying Himself with our corporate fallen humanity, Christ qualified Himself to be the second Adam and legally gained the right to be our Substitute.”¹²⁸

That does not mean for Sequeira that Christ in His humanity would have been exactly like us in our fallen humanity. Certainly “Scripture teaches that Christ actually did *assume* our condemned sinful human nature as we know it. But He totally defeated ‘the law of sin and death’ (Rom. 8:2) that resided in that sinful human nature and then executed it on the cross. Had Christ consented, even by a thought, to the sinful desires of that nature which He assumed, then He would have become a sinner in need of a savior Himself. That is why, in dealing with the human nature of Christ, we must be exceedingly careful not to drag His mind or His choice into sin or to say that He ‘had’ a sinful nature.”¹²⁹

With respect to the problem of sin, Sequeira emphasizes that we should not go beyond what the Scriptures say. “We must *not* teach

that in Adam all humanity also inherits his guilt. This is the heresy of 'original sin' introduced by Augustine and adopted by the Roman Catholic Church. Guilt, in a legal sense, always includes personal volition or responsibility, and God does not hold us personally responsible for something in which we had no choice. Only when we personally, consciously, deliberately, persistently, and ultimately reject the gift of eternal life in Christ does the guilt and responsibility of sin and the second death become ours (see John 3:18, 36; Mark 16:15; Heb. 2:1-4; 10:14, 26-29)."¹³⁰

Sequeira's Christology is only a foundation for his theology regarding how sinners are saved "in Christ." His nontraditional stand against substitutionary atonement has proved to be controversial, but he clearly takes a stand in favor of traditional Christology, basing his arguments on Scripture and not Ellen White.

Ellen White's Latest Statement on Christ's Human Nature

We began this study of history focusing on 150 years of Adventist Christology with an early statement of Ellen White. We shall add the finishing touch to this history with one of her later statements. This intriguing statement was discovered only recently and deals with the most controversial portion of the issue: whether Christ was subjected to all the "evil tendencies" of humanity or if He was exempt from them.

Our research confirms George Knight's that Ellen White never used the expression "sinful tendencies" in relation to Christ's human nature. According to Knight, it was "the teachings of Prescott, Waggoner, and Jones on the tendencies of Christ's human nature" that "permeated the Adventist air in the mid-nineties."¹³¹ But the newly discovered letter raises the question of whether she used an even stronger term.

The *Adventist Review* of February 17, 1994, announced that a previously unpublished letter from Ellen White had just recently been discovered.¹³² Written on August 29, 1903, at Elmhaven, St. Helena, California, this letter was addressed to Dr. J. H. Kellogg.¹³³ It appears that it may never have been sent, as was the case with several other letters held back by Ellen White while waiting to see how the con-

troversty with Kellogg would develop between the years 1902 and 1908. Whatever the reason, this letter, or its copy, was misfiled. Archivist Tim Poirier discovered it quite by chance in December 1993. When the announcement of its discovery was made, the White Estate offered a copy to anyone who wished to have it.

Like the majority of Ellen White's letters, it dealt with various topics of a practical nature. But one of the paragraphs touched on Christ's humanity in terms that are particularly significant. While proofreading the passage in which she speaks of the fallen human nature assumed by Christ, Ellen White made several alterations by hand to the typed text. These handwritten alterations are included below in italics. This sample of her writing testifies to her concern for clarity on a point particularly sensitive and liable to misinterpretation. Here is the paragraph in question:

"When Christ first announced to the heavenly host His mission and work in the world, He declared that He was to leave His position of dignity and disguise His holy mission by assuming the likeness of a man, when in reality He was the Son of the infinite God. And when the fullness of time was come, He stepped down from His throne of highest command, laid aside His royal robe and kingly crown, clothed His divinity with humanity, and came to this earth to exemplify what humanity must do and be in order to overcome the enemy and to sit with the Father upon His throne. Coming as He did, as a man, *to meet and be subjected to* with all the evil tendencies to which man is heir, *working in every conceivable manner to destroy His faith*, He made it possible for Himself to be buffeted by human agencies inspired by Satan, the rebel who had been expelled from heaven."¹³⁴

This text parallels something Ellen White had published in *Early Writings*.¹³⁵ There she used, for the first time, the expression "man's fallen human nature" to describe the nature assumed by Christ. In the statement of 1903 she wanted to be still more precise. At first she had written: "Coming as He did, as a man, with all the evil tendencies to which man is heir, He made it possible for Himself to be buffeted by human agencies inspired by Satan." This would appear to be clear support for a human nature subjected to "all the evil tendencies" but to which Christ never succumbed.

But evidently Ellen White, upon rereading the typewritten text, felt that this was not quite the thought she intended to convey. So she added the two handwritten phrases that are italicized above. With the interlineated text added, the passage would read: "Coming as He did, as a man, to meet and be subjected to all the evil tendencies to which man is heir, working in every conceivable manner to destroy His faith, He made it possible for Himself to be buffeted by human agencies inspired by Satan." Some would say that this revision is a significant change of meaning, making it appear that the evil tendencies were in others that were arrayed against Christ, though this is debatable.

In publishing this important passage, the editor of the *Adventist Review* wrote quite appropriately: "Students of Ellen White's writings will be interested in the final sentence of this paragraph. They will observe how she was concerned not to be misunderstood and, upon reading the typed draft, made changes in her own hand that attempted to make her meaning clearer. This statement will take its place among the many others she wrote about the human nature of Jesus."¹³⁶

According to Paul Gordon, at that time director of the Ellen G. White Estate, "any new letter or letters are not likely to change significantly Adventists' understanding of her [Ellen White's] teachings. We already have such a large collection of her writings in books, letters, diaries, and manuscripts, that we can be confident of knowing what she believed."¹³⁷

In the following paragraphs Ellen White explained the secret of Christ's victory over the "evil tendencies." "As the Head of humanity, Christ lived on this earth a perfect, consistent life, in conformity with the will of His heavenly Father. When He left the courts of heaven, He announced the mission that He designed to fulfill. 'Lo, I come,' He declared: 'in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God.' Always uppermost in His mind and heart was the thought 'Not My human will, but Thy will, be done.' This was the infallible principle that actuated Him in all His words and works, and that molded His character."¹³⁸

Thus, having conquered "all the evil tendencies to which man is heir," Christ Jesus our Lord "gave us an example of what men and

women must be, if they are accepted as His disciples and hold the beginning of their confidence firm unto the end.”¹³⁹ For “throughout His experience, during the thirty-three years He spent on this earth, Christ was beset with all the temptations wherewith the human family are tempted; yet He was without a stain of sin.”¹⁴⁰

Having reached the end of a study embracing 150 years of Adventist Christology, our purpose is to proceed with a synthesis of the knowledge gained so far and to lay the groundwork for an evaluation of the different positions. Ultimately, we hope to suggest a Christology that harmonizes with biblical teaching, and to reconcile the different points of view.

References and Notes

¹ Ralph Larson, *The Word Was Made Flesh*.

² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-21.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-28.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-31.

⁷ See *Ministry*, June 1989, for two book reviews of Ralph Larson's book, by Herbert E. Douglass and Eric C. Webster.

⁸ Larson, pp. 224-264.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 297-300.

¹¹ The Ellen G. White Estate was created by Ellen White herself in 1912. She designated five trustees. In 1950 the number was increased to seven, and in 1958 to nine, one of whom represented South America and one Europe. I was honored to be selected as the nominee from Europe for 20 years, from 1970 to 1990.

¹² See “Documents Available,” from the Ellen G. White Estate, Washington, D.C., May 1982. This brochure suggests that different publications be prepared to correct certain erroneous interpretations of Ellen White writings: on the sanctuary, on the investigative judgment, on health reform, or against the charge of plagiarism.

¹³ This syllabus, *The History of Adventist Christology*, made up of some 120 polygraph pages, was prepared for the benefit of students enrolled in a course on Christology.

¹⁴ The consultations of the Ellen G. White Estate are annual meetings of the trustees, along with members of the White Estate staff, to study problems related to Ellen White's writings, and to lay plans for extending their influence.

¹⁵ Robert W. Olson, letter of April 21, 1986.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Bruno W. Steinweg, supplement to his typescript study “The Doctrine of the Human Nature of Christ Among Adventists Since 1950.”

¹⁹ Robert W. Olson, *The Humanity of Christ* (Washington, D.C.: Ellen G. White Estate, 1986).

- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- ²¹ *Document of Consultation IV of Ellen G. White Estate*. This study has been published in the French magazine *Servir*, second quarter 1989, under the title "La nature humaine du Christ," pp. 13-30.
- ²² See our chapters 15 and 16.
- ²³ See *Document of Consultation IV* under the title "Christ's Humanity."
- ²⁴ *Ibid.* Tim Poirier, *A Comparison of the Christology of Ellen G. White and Her Literary Sources*, pp. 99-104. See also *Ministry*, December 1989.
- ²⁵ Henry Melvill, *Sermons* (New York: Stanford and Swords, 1844). See *White Estate Consultation IV*, pp. 105-115.
- ²⁶ Poirier, p. 100.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ Octavius Winslow, *The Glory of the Redeemer* (London: John Farquhar Shaw, 1855). Ellen White possessed this book in her personal library.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 132-134. Quoted by Poirier, pp. 101, 102.
- ³¹ Poirier, p. 102.
- ³² Ellen G. White letter 191, 1899, in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 1, p. 1083. Quoted by Poirier, p. 103.
- ³³ Ellen G. White manuscript 57, 1890. Quoted by Poirier, p. 103. In several other contexts Ellen White established the same contrast between the two Adams. See our chapter 3.
- ³⁴ Winslow. Quoted by Poirier, p. 102. (Italics supplied.)
- ³⁵ E. G. White manuscript 57, 1890. Quoted by Poirier, p. 103.
- ³⁶ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117.
- ³⁷ ———, *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 267, 268.
- ³⁸ D. A. Delafield, *Ellen White in Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1975).
- ³⁹ ———, in *Document of Consultation IV of the Ellen G. White Estate* (typescript).
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130 (Ellen G. White manuscript 57, 1890).
- ⁴¹ ———, in *Document of Consultation IV*.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 132.
- ⁴⁵ The principal works of George R. Knight are *Myths in Adventism* (1985); *From 1888 to Apostasy*, *The Case of A. T. Jones* (1987); *Angry Saints* (1989); *My Gripe With God* (1990); all published by the Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- ⁴⁶ Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy*, pp. 132-150.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 140.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 141
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁴ *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. v.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. iv.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-50.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 46, 47.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 49.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶⁷ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.

⁶⁸ ———, *Early Writings*, pp. 150, 152.

⁶⁹ ———, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.

⁷⁰ ———, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 177.

⁷¹ ———, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117.

⁷² *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 47.

⁷³ Norman R. Gulley, in *Adventist Review*, Jan. 18, 25, and Feb. 1, 8, 15, 22, 1990. See Donald Karr Short, *Made Like . . . His Brethren* (published by the author, 1991). He severely criticizes these articles, stressing the confusion which they cause at the heart of the church; then defends the fundamental ideas of the traditional Christology.

⁷⁴ Roy Adams, in *Adventist Review*, Mar. 29, 1990; Apr. 19 and 26, 1990. These three editorials were first published in the *Canadian Adventist Messenger*, April and May 1988.

⁷⁵ ———, in *Adventist Review*, Mar. 29, 1990. *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 7, p. 904.

⁷⁶ ———, in *Adventist Review*, March 29, 1990.

⁷⁷ ———, in *Adventist Review*, April 19, 1990.

⁷⁸ ———, in *Adventist Review*, April 26, 1990.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ ———, *The Nature of Christ* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1994). He held the notion of a church divided over perfection.

⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 19-36.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-54.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 69.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58. Adams suggests that he follows the interpretation as "all university seminarians for the past 25 years or so have received it from the lips of longtime theology professor Raoul Dederen."

⁸⁶ See our chapter 9.

⁸⁷ Jean Cazeaux, in *Revue Adventiste*, July 1969.

⁸⁸ Alfred Felix Vaucher (1887-1993) was directly connected with the beginning of the Adventist Church in Europe. As pastor and teacher, he also became a researcher specialized in the field of Bible prophecy. He was honored by Andrews University, which awarded him in 1963 a doctor's degree *honoris causa* for the merit of his contributions.

⁸⁹ Vaucher, in *Revue Adventiste*, February 1978. See also the magazine *Servir*, first quarter 1957, pp. 17, 18.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁹¹ Vaucher, *L'Histoire du Salut*, 4th ed. (Dammarie-les-Lys, France: Editions *Vie et Santé*, 1987), pp. 193-198.

⁹² Paul Nouan, in *Revue Adventiste*, December 1994, presents the problem of Christ's nature in a way similar to that of Heppenstall's Christology.

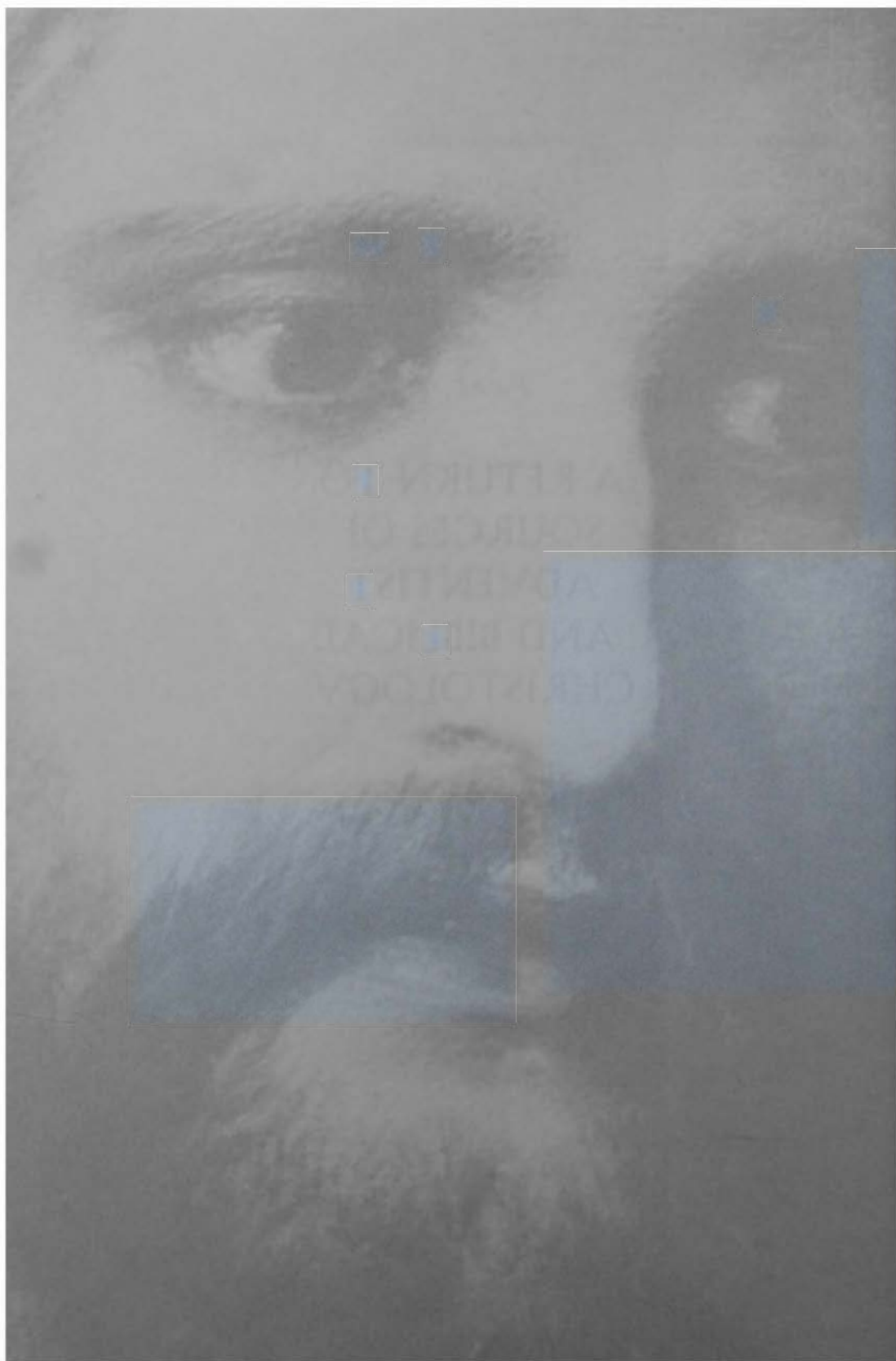
⁹³ The pastors of Belgium, Spain, France, Italy, Portugal, and Switzerland, as well as those of many other countries of Europe, Africa, and the Americas, are trained at the Adventist faculty of theology at Collonges-sous-Salève, France.

- ⁹⁴ See our chapter 12.
- ⁹⁵ Georges Stéveny, *A la découverte du Christ* (Dammarie-les-Lys, France: Editions Vie et Santé, 1991).
- ⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 229-299.
- ⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 259.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 284.
- ⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 287.
- ¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 288, 289.
- ¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 292.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 293.
- ¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 296.
- ¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 298.
- ¹⁰⁶ William G. Johnsson, in *Adventist Review*, July 8 and 22, 1993; Aug. 12, 19, and 26, 1993.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, July 8, 1993.
- ¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, Aug. 12, 1993.
- ¹⁰⁹ See our chapter 12.
- ¹¹⁰ Johnsson, in *Adventist Review*, Aug. 12, 1993.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, Aug. 19, 1993.
- ¹¹² *Ibid.*
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.* See *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1128.
- ¹¹⁴ Johnson, in *Adventist Review*, Aug. 19, 1993. But compare what Ellen White wrote in her letter to Dr. J. H. Kellogg on August 29, 1903 (published in *Adventist Review*, Feb. 17, 1994), discussed in our chapter 14.
- ¹¹⁵ ———, in *Adventist Review*, Aug. 26, 1993.
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁹ See Jack Sequeira's remarks in *Adventist Review*, Sept. 23, 1993.
- ¹²⁰ Jack Sequeira, *Beyond Belief: The Promise, the Power, and the Reality of the Everlasting Gospel* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1993). Sequeira was born in Kenya. He studied theology at Newbold College in England. For 12 years he was a missionary in Africa, then pastored various churches in the United States. At the time of this writing he was head pastor of the Capital Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church in Washington, D.C.
- ¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 11. (Italics supplied.)
- ¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.
- ¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, see pp. 13-16.
- ¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.
- ¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- ¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 42.
- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 43.
- ¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- ¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- ¹³¹ Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy*, p. 144.
- ¹³² *Ibid.* See *Adventist Review*, Feb. 17, 1994.
- ¹³³ Ellen G. White letter 303, 1903.
- ¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

- ¹³⁵ E. G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 150. See our chapter 2.
- ¹³⁶ Johnsson, in *Adventist Review*, Feb. 17, 1994.
- ¹³⁷ *Adventist Review*, Feb. 17, 1994.
- ¹³⁸ Ellen G. White letter 303, 1903.
- ¹³⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Part V

A RETURN TO
SOURCES OF
ADVENTIST
AND BIBLICAL
CHRISTOLOGY



EVALUATION AND CRITIQUE

It would be wrong to think that the question of Christ's human nature is of interest and concern to theologians only. At present the question troubles many church members and threatens to divide churches. The following letter sent by a reader to the editors of the *Adventist Review* is a good indicator of that reality.

"The church that I attend is split down the middle on the subject of the nature of Christ. Arguments break out in the Sabbath school classes, after church, at Sabbath meals, in prayer meetings, on the telephone—everywhere. People are actually losing friendship debating the nature of Christ. Is it really necessary to decide this in order to be a good Adventist? It upsets me, but what can I do?"¹

To answer these anguished questions, it is not sufficient to say, as was done in this case, that it is a matter of "great mystery," that we must "study the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy diligently, assume that the leanings of the church body on this subject are dependable, and avoid all acrimonious discussions."² The church must also have an answer adequate enough to bring comfort to the troubled conscience and to satisfy the mind eager to understand this vital truth about which Ellen White declares: "The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study."³

Having understood the importance of Christ's human nature in the plan of salvation, Adventist pioneers made it the touchstone of their Christology, in harmony with the advice given by the apostle

John: "This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus [come in the flesh] is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist" (1 John 4:2, 3).

Does this imply that we are dealing here with a doctrine upon which salvation depends? Or, to take up the question of our reader, "Is it really necessary to decide this in order to be a good Adventist?"

Is It Really Essential?

Since the controversy about Christ's human nature has now grown to major proportions, many Adventists have seriously asked themselves, Is it really essential to decide?

As early as 1978 the General Conference president, Robert Pierson, was wishing for an end to the division on a question that in his mind was not essential to salvation.⁴ For the same reason, Article 4 of the Fundamental Beliefs concerning "the Son," voted at the General Conference session of 1980, is silent on the issue.

It is true that no one should consider as *essential for salvation* the correct intellectual understanding of any specific doctrine. As George Knight said quite appropriately: "It is not our theology that will save us, but the Lord of our theology."⁵ Accepting Jesus as our personal Saviour and participating in His divine life make us authentic disciples of Christ. Few of the disciples of Jesus throughout the centuries have ever been concerned with the details of Christology that we discuss today. But, like the thief on the cross, they possessed the assurance of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. "We are not to praise the gospel, but praise Christ. We are not to worship the gospel, but the Lord of the gospel,"⁶ exclaims Ellen White.

However, that does not mean that the contents of the gospel or the doctrines are unimportant. Far from it! Christian living and spiritual growth are possible only through the knowledge of "the truth that is in Jesus" (Eph. 4:21). That is why Paul prays that God will grant the believers "the spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Eph. 1:17). Every Christian is called upon to grow "in knowledge in the image of its Creator" (Col. 3:10). No one should stick only to "the elementary truths of God's word"

(Heb. 5:12). All should strive to understand always better “the secret things of God” (1 Cor. 4: 1), and in particular “the mystery of godliness,” that is, to know Christ, “manifested in the flesh, . . . vindicated by the Spirit” (1 Tim. 3:16, RSV).

Christian experience has shown a direct relationship between our understanding of Christ’s human nature and His work of salvation—in other words, between Christology and Soteriology. To be mistaken about the meaning of the Incarnation and the reality of Christ’s humiliation leads inevitably to the consequence of being mistaken about the reality of His work of justification.

The history of Adventist Christology shows that errors of interpretation have been made, especially in light of the fact that today we have at least three explanations dealing with the human nature of Christ. Obviously, they cannot all be in agreement with Scripture and Ellen White’s teaching.

In our search for truth it is necessary to analyze and evaluate the conflicting theses. The basic arguments for each Christological position are briefly summarized below.

Summary of the Three Current Interpretations

Lest some conclude that the Adventist Church is unclear in regard to its belief regarding the Person who is the centerpiece of their faith, let us review the common threads that link them before we examine their differences. Article 4 of the Fundamental Beliefs declares very clearly what Adventists have always believed about Jesus, Son of God and Son of man. Following is the entire text as it was voted at the General Conference session of 1980:

“God the Eternal Son became incarnate in Jesus Christ. Through Him all things were created, the character of God is revealed, the salvation of humanity is accomplished, and the world is judged. Forever truly God, He became also truly man, Jesus the Christ. He was conceived of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived and experienced temptation as a human being, but perfectly exemplified the righteousness and love of God. By His miracles He manifested God’s power and was attested as God’s promised Messiah. He suffered and died voluntarily on the cross for our sins and in our place,

was raised from the dead, and ascended to minister in the heavenly sanctuary in our behalf. He will come again in glory for the final deliverance of His people and the restoration of all things.”⁷

Obviously this declaration does not express itself on the controversial point regarding Christ’s human nature. However, the 1872 statement of beliefs, which remained unchanged until 1931, did specify that Christ “took on him the nature of the seed of Abraham for the redemption of our fallen race.”⁸ Because of differences that arose on this particular point since the 1950s, the delegates at the General Conference session of 1980 judged it wiser to abandon this wording and substitute a formula that expressed the common belief.

This did not stifle the controversy, which only intensified until the different points of view were more clearly defined and an alternative interpretation arose. We choose to call it *alternative* because it borrows a basic argument from each of the other two Christologies, known to theologians as the *postlapsarian* and *prelapsarian* positions. Following is a summary of the three Christologies:

1. The Traditional, or Historical, Christology

This position has historical seniority in the Adventist Church. It is called *postlapsarian* because it teaches that Jesus came in fallen human nature, the nature of Adam *after* the Fall. Consequently Christ’s flesh is considered like that of all human beings. Not a carnal flesh, but a flesh that, in accordance with the law of heredity, carries within it inherent tendencies to sin—tendencies to which Jesus, however, never succumbed. Although “tempted in every way, just as we are” (Heb. 4:15), He committed no sin. Hence, He not only “condemned sin in the flesh” but made it possible that “the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit” (Rom. 8:3, 4, KJV).

This teaching, though based on the New Testament, was contrary to the beliefs of mainline Christianity. This is why Adventists have often been considered as heretics, since some thought they were teaching that Jesus was a sinner by birth, like the rest of humanity.

Many Adventists today do not know that their church has taught, for a century—from the origin of the movement until

1950—the postlapsarian position. However, some Adventist theologians, not understanding how it could be possible for Jesus to live without sin in fallen human nature, believed it was necessary to formulate a new Christology.

2. The New Christology, or the Prelapsarian Position

The basic argument of the new Christology is well known: Jesus “took Adam’s sinless human nature,” that is to say, Adam’s nature *before* the Fall. Actually, “in Him was no sin, either inherited or cultivated, as is common to all the natural descendants of Adam.”⁹ Even “if Christ was tempted in all points as we are,” it was never from within, since He inherited from Adam *none* of our propensities to sin.

In short, “whatever Jesus took was not His intrinsically or innately. . . . All that Jesus took, all that He *bore*, whether the burden and penalty of our iniquities, or the diseases and frailties of our human nature—all was taken and borne *vicariously*.”¹⁰ “*Vicariously* He took our sinful, fallen nature. . . . He bore our weaknesses, our temptations, *vicariously*, in the same way He bore our iniquities.”¹¹

It is difficult to understand why the traditional teaching was suddenly discarded. Apparently it was not so much a lack of awareness of the historical position as it was a desire on the part of some to be recognized as “authentic” Christians.

What is most surprising is that the promoters of the new Christology rest their case on Ellen White’s writings. Thus the dispute boils down to differences of interpretation in regard to certain crucial Ellen White statements.

3. The Alternative Christology

The alternative Christology is the most recent, and probably the most widespread today. It is now promoted in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*,¹² prepared by more than 200 representative church leaders and scholars drawn from the highest levels of the denomination.

In harmony with the traditional Christology of the pioneers, the alternative position teaches that Jesus took Adam’s human nature *after* the Fall. Obviously, according to its promoters, Christ did not come “in power and splendor,” or even with the sinless nature of

Adam. On the contrary, He took the form of a servant, with a nature enfeebled by 4,000 years of degeneration of the race.

This does not imply, however, that Jesus inherited “evil tendencies” from Adam. Although the body of Christ was subject to physical deterioration and inherited the weaknesses of man’s physical constitution, He inherited none of the inclinations to evil associated with fallen human nature.

Based on a formula borrowed from one of Ellen White’s sources, the Anglican minister Henry Melvill, they maintain that Jesus inherited from Adam only “innocent infirmities,” and “such characteristics as hunger, pain, weakness, sorrow, and death. Although these are consequences of sin, they are not sinful.”¹³ Thus, Christ was neither exactly like Adam before the Fall nor exactly like Adam after the Fall. Unlike all other fallen human beings, He was born without evil tendencies. On this point they agree with the new Christology.

Each of these Christologies is defined on the basis of human heredity. Obviously, the differences of interpretation suggest that mistakes have been made. Ellen White suggested the essential cause: “We make many mistakes because of our erroneous views of the human nature of our Lord. When we give to His human nature a power that it is not possible for man to have in his conflicts with Satan, we destroy the completeness of His humanity.”¹⁴

This statement clearly suggests the criterion upon which an interpretation must be evaluated. We must reconsider any interpretation that lessens or obscures Christ’s participation in sinful human nature if we wish for a return to a biblical Christology.

Errors of Appraisal

At the various Ellen G. White Estate annual consultations, we had the opportunity not only to study the Christology of the pioneers but also to critique certain aspects of the new Christology. Errors, some of them serious, had to be raised and corrected.

The first such error was overlooking the traditional teaching of the church. It is difficult to understand why the unanimous declarations made by Adventist leaders for more than a century should have been condemned without serious verification. If the promoters of

the new Christology had examined the church's official literature ever so little, in the light of history, they probably would not have declared that only a minority of Adventists had written that Christ took a fallen human nature—that of Adam *after* the Fall. Moreover, they never would have dared to say that “this erroneous minority position” was that of a few “irresponsible lunatics.”¹⁵

A more serious error of appraisal was made in interpreting Ellen White's teaching, which the promoters of the new theology relied upon to show that Christ had taken the sinless nature of Adam *before* the Fall. No such statement is found anywhere in Ellen White's writings; and the contrary is affirmed hundreds of times. How, then, could someone write that “in only three or four places in all these inspired counsels” of Ellen White are allusions made to the fallen human nature assumed by Christ?¹⁶

The evangelical inquirers, with whom the problem of the Incarnation was discussed in the 1950s, were not mistaken when they based the bulk of their criticism on the book *Bible Readings for the Home Circle*. This book stated that Christ came “in sinful flesh.” Why were they made to believe that “this expression slipped into the book” by some unknown error?¹⁷ Actually this book, up to when the Christology was changed around 1950, was the most representative one about general Adventist beliefs.

Finally, the way that the new Christology was presented constitutes in itself an additional error. Publishing it without the authors' names, and under the title *Seventh-day Adventists Answer Questions on Doctrine*, could only trigger a justifiable reaction. Why should the new Christology of *Questions on Doctrine* be considered more in compliance with biblical truth than that formerly contained in *Bible Readings*? Only a critical examination of the different points of view can provide an answer.

A Doctrine Condemned by the Church

The new Christology was presented by its promoters as “the new milestone” of Adventism. Obviously, for Adventist believers this teaching was new, but not for other Christians. Actually it was a rather regrettable return to the old-time teaching of the mainline Christian churches.

In order to regard Christ as having a sinless human nature, like Adam's *before* the Fall, the councils of the Catholic Church believed it necessary to invent the dogma of the immaculate conception of Mary. The Protestant churches, in contrast, based their Christology on the Augustinian doctrine of original sin, according to which all men are sinners and guilty by birth. Christ therefore could not resemble them, since He was neither a sinner nor guilty. Hence the general belief that Jesus, from His incarnation, had taken Adam's human nature *before* the Fall.

Adventist pioneers were opposed to the doctrines of the immaculate conception and original sin. Some new converts to Adventism sometimes had difficulties in understanding how Christ, with a fallen human nature, could live without sin, as the pioneers taught. Letters were written to Ellen White "affirming that Christ could not have had the same nature as man, for if He had, He would have fallen under similar temptations." Here is her reply: "If He did not have man's nature, He could not be our example. If He was not a partaker of our nature, He could not have been tempted as man has been. If it were not possible for Him to yield to temptation, He could not be our helper."¹⁸

The new Christology is not only a return to these very old Christian beliefs; it is also a return to a belief openly rejected by the Adventist Church. Let us remember the unhappy experience of the holy flesh movement. This movement also taught that "Christ took Adam's nature *before* he fell; so He took humanity as it was in the Garden of Eden."¹⁹

This teaching was discussed and condemned at the General Conference session of 1901. When Ellen White was informed, she returned from Australia and in person opposed this doctrine of holy flesh. She did not hesitate one moment to describe it as "erroneous theories and methods" and as "cheap, miserable inventions of men's theories, prepared by the father of lies."²⁰

The supporters of the new theology never mention this incident in their history of the Adventist doctrines. Whereas the author of *Movement of Destiny* retraces in minute detail how the pioneers surmounted their differences in regard to Christ's divine nature, he says

not a single word about what they taught unitedly about His human nature. Likewise, he devotes several chapters to the 1888 message and to the role played by Waggoner and Jones, but maintains a significant silence as to their Christology. Yet this constituted the basis for their message of justification by faith.

Tendentious Methods

The original statement of the new Christology as it appeared in the *Ministry*, September 1956, section 111, depends on nine Ellen White quotations, without comments or biblical references. The general title announces the basic concept of the new theology: "Took Sinless Nature of Adam Before the Fall." Then, to introduce each one of the quotations, there is a subheading intended to reinforce the main idea conveyed, such as "Christ Took Humanity as God Created It"; "Took Human Form but Not Corrupted Sinful Nature"; "Took Adam's Sinless Human Nature"; "Perfect Sinlessness of Human Nature"; etc.²¹

One does not have to be an expert to notice that not one of the Ellen White quotations cited in this document truly agrees with the subheadings. Ellen White never wrote what the subheadings insinuate. On the contrary, she affirms exactly the opposite. But none of those statements are mentioned. Having accepted the position common to mainline Christianity with regard to Christ's human nature, and apparently convinced that this was also Ellen White's position, the editors published a tendentious selection of quotations to justify their point of view without an objective textual foundation.

The abbreviated statement in *Movement of Destiny* constitutes another typical example. Each statement, quoted without a reference, deserves to be carefully examined, placed in its immediate context, and explained in the light of Ellen White's general teaching.²² We will limit our demonstration to the following sentence: "Christ was like Adam *before* the Fall—a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon Him.""²³

But this does violence to the original text. The first part, "Christ was like Adam *before* the Fall," is presented as if it were from Ellen White's pen, whereas it is actually by the author of the text. The sec-

ond part: “a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon Him,” is actually Ellen White’s description of *Adam*, not Christ. Here is the statement in its original context: “The first Adam was created a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon him; he was in the image of God. . . . But Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. He took upon Himself human nature, and was tempted in all points as human nature is tempted.”²⁴

If this statement from Ellen White’s letter to W.H.L. Baker were not sufficiently explicit, the following *Desire of Ages* statement leaves no doubt as to what she taught on the subject: “In our humanity, Christ was to redeem Adam’s failure. But when Adam was assailed by the tempter, none of the effects of sin were upon him. He stood in the strength of perfect manhood, possessing the full vigor of mind and body. He was surrounded with the glories of Eden. . . . It was not thus with Jesus when He entered the wilderness to cope with Satan. For four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth; and Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation.”²⁵

Another example of “erroneous methods” is ignoring clear statements from *The Desire of Ages* in favor of others in the letter to Baker. Only someone who had lost all sense of proportion could write that the statements contained in the letter to Baker “strongly counterbalanced” “the three or four places” in which Ellen White uses the terms “fallen nature” and “sinful nature,” to describe the human nature assumed by Christ.

In the face of these “erroneous methods and theories,” only a healthy exegesis, taking into account all available sources and the meaning of the terms employed, will make it possible to reestablish a unity of interpretation regarding Christ’s human nature. It is true that very few of the current supporters of the new Christology still follow the erroneous methods of their founders. Today a single argument—in fact, one single word—is used by many of them to justify their point of view. But will this argument stand up to careful scrutiny?

A Fictitious Argument, a Misleading Expression

The method and the system of interpretation employed in the book *Questions on Doctrine* differ somewhat from those used in the basic document of the new Christology. Here, proponents no longer affirm explicitly that “Christ took the sinless nature of Adam before the Fall,” though they firmly maintain that “in His human nature Christ was perfect and sinless.”²⁶ They no longer deny that “He was the second Adam, coming in the ‘likeness’ of sinful human flesh (Rom. 8:3).”²⁷ They even recognize that Ellen White “occasionally” used expressions such as “sinful nature” or “fallen nature” of Christ.²⁸

However, they are eager to specify that “whatever Jesus took was not His intrinsically or innately. . . . All that Jesus took, all that He bore, whether the burden and penalty of our iniquities, or the diseases and frailties of our human nature—all was taken and borne *vicariously*.”²⁹ According to the authors of *Questions on Doctrine*, “it is in this sense that all should understand the writings of Ellen G. White when she refers occasionally to sinful, fallen, and deteriorated human nature.”³⁰

If Ellen White had really written that Christ took our fallen human nature simply *vicariously*, as well as taking *vicariously* the sins of the whole world, that would be a weighty argument. Actually, Ellen White never used the word “vicariously,”³¹ nor did she ever write that Christ “took sinless human nature.”³²

On the other hand, Ellen White did use, but only once, the word “vicarious” with regard to Christ’s redemptive sacrifice.³³ Certainly Jesus could not pardon sins and impute His righteousness to repentant sinners other than by substitution. But to state that He took fallen human nature vicariously means that He took it only apparently and not in reality. It would also mean that Christ’s death should be understood vicariously, since the wages of sin are death, and that the human nature of Jesus was sinless. In brief, this kind of reasoning leads ultimately to docetism, that is, a Christology in which Jesus is a human being only in appearance.

For us it is unthinkable that Ellen White should have insisted on the reality of Christ’s participation “in the flesh and blood” of humanity, “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” while meaning that this par-

ticipation was ultimately only vicarious. This expression is found nowhere in her writings, so there is no support for such an interpretation. On the contrary, Ellen White did not cease to emphasize the reality of humanity's fallen nature assumed by Christ.

How could she have said it more clearly? "Christ did not make believe take human nature; He did verily take it. He did in reality possess human nature." And to leave no doubt on the kind of human nature, she adds: "'As the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same' (Heb. 2:14). He was the son of Mary; He was of the seed of David according to human descent. He is declared to be a man, even the Man Christ Jesus."³⁴ "He did not have a mere semblance of a body, but He took human nature, participating in the life of humanity."³⁵ "He was not only made flesh, but He was made in the likeness of sinful flesh."³⁶

Ellen White does not, as a rule, use symbolic or metaphorical language with a double meaning. The principle she expressed regarding the interpretation of biblical language applies likewise to her own: "The language of the Bible should be explained according to its obvious meaning, unless a symbol or figure is employed."³⁷ She wrote in plain language that means exactly what she wanted to say. This was all the more necessary with regard to the delicate and difficult topic of Christ's human nature.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Alternative Christology

Our evaluation would be incomplete if the basic concepts of the alternative Christology were not also submitted to a critical examination. On the one hand, this mediating position has the merit of reinforcing the postlapsarian position; but on the other hand, it perpetuates the chief error of the prelapsarian position by declaring Christ's human nature sinless.

Indeed, the supporters of the alternative Christology affirm, as did the pioneers, that Christ's humanity is not Adam's innocent humanity before the Fall. In order to accomplish the work of salvation for which the Father had sent Jesus in a flesh "like that of sin," it was necessary that He come "in the humble form of a servant at His Incarnation, depicting servitude, subjection, subordination. He took a weakened

human nature, not the perfect nature Adam had before he sinned.”³⁸

This position makes great strides in the direction of a return to the central truth of the gospel. But it still clings to the erroneous idea of the doctrine of original sin, according to which human beings are born sinners. Since Jesus cannot be allowed to inherit sin, He must be born with an impeccable nature. Thus, they say that Christ inherited only the weaknesses of human physical constitution, “the innocent infirmities”: “Hunger, pain, weakness, sorrow, and death,” but no “tendency to sin” or “sinful propensities.”³⁹

These conclusions mask several regrettable misunderstandings. The first involves the mission of Jesus. The purpose of the Incarnation was not to liberate humanity from all “innocent infirmities,” but to deliver from indwelling sin which “brings me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:23, KJV). It is to set us free from the slavery of sin that Jesus was sent in “the likeness of sinful flesh” and had to be “made like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:17, KJV).

There is also a misunderstanding of certain terms, such as “inherent propensities” and “evil propensities.” These expressions are not analogous in Ellen White. A propensity is a tendency, a bent, an enticement to temptation. If resisted, it is not sin. “Inherent propensities” become “evil propensities” only after yielding to temptation. Ellen White says, “Do not set Him [Christ] before the people as a man with the propensities of sin. He is the second Adam. The first Adam was created a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon him. . . . Because of sin, his posterity was born with inherent propensities of disobedience. But Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. He took upon Himself human nature. . . . Not for one moment was there in Him an evil propensity.”⁴⁰ Of course, “He knows by experience what are the weaknesses of humanity, what are our wants, and where lies the strength of our temptations; for He was ‘in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin’ (Heb. 4:15).”⁴¹

Likewise, there is a misunderstanding between the expressions “evil tendencies” and “evil propensities.” Ellen White makes a clear distinction between the two expressions. While she solemnly declares that Jesus never had “evil propensities,”⁴² she also affirms that He had

to “meet and be subjected to all the evil tendencies to which man is heir working in every conceivable manner to destroy his faith.”⁴³

As William Hyde observed, “although burdened by the weakness of fallen humanity, Jesus never allowed the tendencies and propensities of the human race to become evil propensities. He never permitted a human weakness to become a personal sin. Although He was tempted with sin, He never participated in sin, He never developed evil or sinful propensities.”⁴⁴

To justify the view that Jesus had a sinless human nature, Heppenstall affirmed that sin was not transmitted “by natural propagation.” Being “a spiritual thing,” sin itself cannot “be transmitted genetically.”⁴⁵ If this were true, it should be valid for all mankind, which is clearly not the case. By declaring that Jesus was “born of woman, born under law” (Gal. 4:4) Paul confirms that Jesus inherited, as all men, “the results of the working of the great law of heredity. What these results were is shown in the history of His earthly ancestors. He came with such a heredity to share our sorrows and temptations, and to give us the example of a sinless life.”⁴⁶ The difference between Jesus and the rest of humanity does not come from the fact that all humans are sinners by heredity. They are sinners “because all sinned” (Rom. 5:12). Only Jesus never sinned, although He came “in the likeness of sinful flesh.”

Obviously, Christ’s ancestors possessed more than mere “innocent infirmities.” Ellen White affirmed that “Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus, could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation.”⁴⁷ “In taking upon Himself man’s nature in its fallen condition, Christ did not in the least participate in its sin.”⁴⁸

To explain this paradox, it is imperative that we free ourselves from the errors of the immaculate conception and of original sin. This is what we shall attempt to accomplish in the final chapter on the basis of Scripture.

References and Notes

¹ *Adventist Review*, Mar. 31, 1994.

² *Ibid.*

- ³Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 244.
- ⁴Robert H. Pierson, in *Review and Herald*, Dec. 7, 1978. See *Adventist Review*, Nov. 1, 1990: "An Appeal for Church Unity," from the Biblical Research Institute.
- ⁵George R. Knight, *From 1888 to Apostasy*, p. 135.
- ⁶*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 7, p. 907.
- ⁷*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 36.
- ⁸See our chapter 2.
- ⁹R. Allan Anderson, in *Ministry*, September 1956. See our chapter 14.
- ¹⁰*Questions on Doctrine*, pp. 61, 62.
- ¹¹W. E. Read, in *Ministry*, April 1957. See our chapter 10.
- ¹²See *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, pp. 45-52.
- ¹³*Ibid.*, p. 68.
- ¹⁴Ellen G. White manuscript 1, 1892. In *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 7, p. 929.
- ¹⁵LeRoy Edwin Froom, *Movement of Destiny*, p. 428. See our chapter 10.
- ¹⁶Anderson.
- ¹⁷*Ibid.*
- ¹⁸E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 408 (*Review and Herald*, Feb. 18, 1890).
- ¹⁹S. N. Haskell to Ellen G. White, Sept. 25, 1900. (Italics supplied.) See our chapter 7.
- ²⁰Ellen G. White letter 132, 1900 (*Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 37). See our chapter 7.
- ²¹Anderson. See our chapter 10.
- ²²Ralph Larson does a critical analysis of this statement in *The Word Was Made Flesh*, pp. 249-261.
- ²³Froom, p. 497.
- ²⁴Ellen G. White letter 8, 1895, in *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1128.
- ²⁵E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117.
- ²⁶Anderson. See our chapter 10.
- ²⁷*Questions on Doctrine*, p. 55.
- ²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 52.
- ²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 60.
- ³⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 61, 62.
- ³¹See the Ellen G. White CD-ROM. It is true that the word "vicariously" appears in a subtitle in *Selected Messages*, book 3, page 133. Obviously, that subtitle should be credited to the authors of the compilation of the book and not to Ellen White's pen.
- ³²*Questions on Doctrine*, p. 650.
- ³³E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, Nov. 1, 1892.
- ³⁴E. G. White, in *Review and Herald*, April 5, 1906 (*Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 247).
- ³⁵Ellen G. White letter 97, 1898.
- ³⁶Ellen G. White letter 106, June 26, 1896. Quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1126.
- ³⁷E. G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 599.
- ³⁸Edward Heppenstall, *The Man Who Is God*, p. 74. See our chapter 12.
- ³⁹Roy Adams, in *Review and Herald*, Apr. 26, 1990, and *The Nature of Christ*, pp. 68, 69.
- ⁴⁰*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1128.
- ⁴¹E. G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 71.
- ⁴²*The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1128.
- ⁴³Ellen G. White manuscript 303, 1903, published in *Review and Herald*, Feb. 17, 1994. However, not only was this manuscript never published in Ellen White's lifetime, it was never even mailed, and so must be used with extreme caution.

⁴⁴ William T. Hyde, in *Ministry*, February 1972. See our chapter 12.

⁴⁵ Heppenstall, p. 126. See our chapter 12.

⁴⁶ E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

⁴⁸ E. G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 256.

BIBLICAL DATA OF CHRISTOLOGY

The position that Christ took fallen human nature has had only a few supporters throughout the history of Christianity, and those who taught it have often been considered heretics. This must be readily acknowledged. But truth does not depend on the number of its followers. Many essential biblical truths have been distorted throughout the centuries by reason of preconceived ideas or erroneous concepts, resulting in teaching that was often completely foreign to the Scriptures.

The problem of the nature and destiny of humanity is a prime example.¹ By accepting the Platonic idea of immortality of the soul, the Church Fathers perpetuated serious errors concerning death, resurrection, and eternal life. Likewise, disregarding the New Testament data on the subject of Christ's human nature, arbitrary theories were formulated, resulting in faulty doctrine.

The New Testament Evidence

To solve a problem, one must start with a careful analysis of the data. A problem well understood is half solved. The clearly defined scriptural data on which Christology rests can be summarized as a paradox: Christ participated "in the likeness of sinful flesh" without participating in any of the sins of humanity.

This twofold affirmation is set forth in the heart of the prologue of John's Gospel. On the one hand, the apostle declares, "The Word became flesh"; and on the other hand he states that the Word "made

his dwelling among us . . . full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). The paradox arises from the fact that while having become human in a state of fallenness, Christ nevertheless lived among us without sin, in perfect obedience to the law of God.

John makes this truth the touchstone of his Christology: “This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus [come in flesh] is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist” (1 John 4:2, 3).

The word “flesh” in John generally has a pejorative connotation. Human beings are born according to “the will of the flesh” (John 1:13, KJV), and they “judge after the flesh” (John 8:15, KJV). And John concludes: “For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:16, KJV). Jesus Himself systematically opposed “the flesh” to “the Spirit.” “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit” (John 3:6). “The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing” (John 6:63).

Paul likewise emphasized in his Epistles the opposition between the flesh and the Spirit in the person of Christ. In the introduction of his Epistle to the Romans, he defines the twofold nature of Christ in these terms: “made of the seed of David according to *the flesh*; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to *the spirit of holiness*” (Rom. 1:3, 4, KJV). Then, appealing to the greatness of the “mystery of godliness,” Paul states once again the basics of Christology: “God was manifest *in the flesh, justified in the Spirit*” (1 Tim. 3:16, KJV).

Not content with affirming that Christ is at the same time *flesh* and *Spirit*—that is to say, both *truly man*, and *truly God*—Paul says God sent “his *own Son* in the *likeness* of sinful flesh,” thus condemning “sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3). Whatever the meaning given to the word “likeness,” it cannot signify that Christ’s flesh might be different from that of humanity at His birth. Jesus, therefore, was not like Adam before the Fall, for God had not created Adam “in the likeness of sinful flesh.”

In his Epistle to the Philippians Paul emphasizes the paradox be-

tween the reality of the human condition and the perfection of Jesus' obedience to the very end of His life. On the one hand, the apostle stresses the full and entire participation of Christ in human nature: He took "the very nature of a servant" (literally, slave); He was "made in human likeness"; He was "found in appearance as a man" and was "obedient to death—even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:7, 8). In other words, although "born of a woman, born under law," like all human beings, by His perfect obedience to the law of God, Christ not only "condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3, KJV), but He became the Redeemer of "those under law" (Gal. 4:5). In effect, writes Paul, "through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2).

The Epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes this same twofold aspect of the person and work of Christ. "For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made *like* his brothers in every way" (Heb. 2:16, 17). Since the brothers "are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself took part of the same" (verse 14, KJV). Therefore, He "has been tempted in every way, just as we are," yet "without sin" (Heb. 4:15). This was the condition necessary to fulfill His mission of serving as "a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted" (Heb. 2:17, 18, KJV).

This is the fundamental biblical data of Christology. No one has the right to weaken or alter the data with arguments lacking sound biblical foundation.

The Biblical Concept of Sin

One of the main problems in Christology involves misconceptions about the nature of sin. In order to resolve the problem of Christ's human nature, we must determine first the biblical concept of sin. Throughout the centuries it has been understood in many ways, but rarely in harmony with the teaching of the Scriptures.

Catholics and many Protestants teach the doctrine of original sin. There are various ways of understanding this doctrine, but the basic

concept is that we are sinners by birth, guilty simply because we belong to the human family as descendants from Adam. From this point of view, if Jesus had been born with the same sinful nature as all other men, He would be a sinner, guilty by birth. Consequently, He could not be our Saviour.

Having adopted this premise, in harmony with evangelical theologians, the promoters of the new Adventist Christology could only conclude that "Christ had taken the nature of Adam *before* the Fall." In order to be the Saviour of the world, Christ had to possess a sinless nature, which He could not have had if He was born with the nature of Adam *after* the Fall.

Because there is no biblical basis for the doctrine of original sin, traditional Adventism condemned it or simply ignored it. Ellen White, in all her writings, never mentioned it. Once only she used the expression "the original sin," in relation to Adam's sin committed in the very beginning. "Every sin committed," she wrote, "awakens the echo of the original sin."² Today some theologians of other confessions likewise consider the doctrine of original sin as foreign to the teaching of the Bible.³

In order to understand the teaching of the Bible on the subject of sin, it is not enough to know that "sin is lawlessness" (1 John 3:4), and that all men are sinners "because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12). The writers of Scripture, and Paul in particular, establish certain distinctions without which Christ's human nature remains incomprehensible. First, it is important not to confuse sin as a principle of action, and *sins* in action.

1. Sin as Power, and Sins as Actions

The Bible establishes an important distinction between sin in the singular, as the power of temptation, and sins in the plural, as acts of transgression of the law. Paul, in particular, makes a difference between what he calls "the law of sin," which held him "prisoner" (Rom. 7:23), and "the works of the flesh," which he catalogs (Gal. 5:19-21, KJV; Titus 3:3).

In his analysis of the man "sold under sin," Paul specifies that the principle of sin lives in him, that is to say, in his flesh. This princi-

ple acts in his members, and is “waging war against the law” of the mind. Even “when I want to do good,” he says, “evil is right there with me.” “I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.” Consequently, “if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me” (Rom. 7:14-23).

Paul defines the principle that makes humanity “a prisoner of the law of sin” by using various expressions. First, he calls it “the minding of the flesh” (*phronema tes sarkos*), as opposed to “the minding of the Spirit” (*phronema tou pneumatos*) (Rom. 8:6). This word *phronema* includes the *affections*, the *will* as well as the *reason* of the one who lives “according to our sinful nature” or “according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:4, 7). Paul also uses the expression: “the desires of your sinful nature” (*epithumia sarkos*) (Gal. 5:16, 17), translated most often by the word “lust” (Rom. 1:24; 6:12; 7:7). Finally, the expression “the power of sin” (*dunamis tes hamartias*) (1 Cor. 15:56) conveys well the dynamic aspect of the principle that works in man and renders him a slave of sin.

By these expressions Paul does not refer to acts of sin, but simply to the tendencies of the flesh that impel us to sin. These are only inclinations and not yet sins. But these natural tendencies to disobedience, inherited from Adam, inevitably become actual sins when we yield to their enticements.

In his analysis of the process of temptation, James establishes precisely the difference that exists between “lust” (*epithumia*) and the sinful act. According to him, “each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire (*epithumia*), he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death” (James 1:14, 15). In other words, “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16), which are at the origin of all the temptations, even those of Christ in the wilderness, become sins only with the consent of the one who is tempted.

Ellen White confirms this point of view when she writes: “There are thoughts and feelings suggested and aroused by Satan that annoy even the best of men; but if they are not cherished, if they are repulsed as hateful, the soul is not contaminated with guilt, and no

other is defiled by their influence.”⁴ Whatever may be the intensity of the temptation, it is never, in itself, a sin. “No man can be forced to transgress. His own consent must be first gained; the soul must purpose the sinful act before passion can dominate over reason or iniquity triumph over conscience. Temptation, however strong, is never an excuse for sin.”⁵

Ellen White writes: “The Son of God in His humanity wrestled with the very same fierce, apparently overwhelming temptations that assail men—temptation to indulgence of appetite, to presumptuous venturing where God has not led them, and to the worship of the god of this world, to sacrifice an eternity of bliss for the fascinating pleasures of this life.”⁶ “He knows by experience what are the weaknesses of humanity, what are our wants, and where lies the strength of our temptations; for He was ‘in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.’”⁷

The difference between Jesus and human beings does not lie at the level of the flesh, or at the level of temptation, since He “was in all points tempted like as we are.” The difference rests in the fact that Jesus never yielded to the enticements of the flesh, whereas all of us, without exception, have succumbed to them, and are now under the power of sin (Rom. 3:9). Even when a person has the desire to do good, he does not have the power by himself to resist the power of sin which dwells within him (Rom. 7:18). Christ alone, by the power of the Spirit of God, of which He was the bearer, was able to resist “unto blood, striving against sin” (Heb. 12:4, KJV). Ellen White confirms: “Though He had all the strength of passion of humanity, never did He yield to temptation to do one single act which was not pure and elevating and ennobling.”⁸

To understand how Jesus could live without sin “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” another important distinction should be made: the difference between the *consequences of Adam’s sin*, transmitted to all his descendants according to “the great law of heredity,”⁹ and guilt, which is not transmissible from parent to child.

2. Only Those Who Sin Are Guilty

According to the doctrine of original sin, not only are the desires

of the flesh guilty, but all humans are considered guilty by nature from birth because of Adam's sin. This explains the practice of infant baptism to take away the curse of sin. This belief and practice are totally foreign to Scripture. Not even Romans 5:12, the *locus classicus* of the doctrine of original sin, affirms at all that all human beings are born sinners. Besides, Paul adds that up to the time of Moses, humankind "had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (verse 14, KJV).

Scripture teaches that guilt is not transmissible by heredity. Only the one who sins is guilty. "Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; *each* is to die *for his own sin*" (Deut. 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6). The prophet Ezekiel repeats this same law in these terms: "The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous man will be credited to him, and the wickedness of the wicked will be charged against him" (Eze. 18:20).

Each is therefore guilty for his own faults. Consequently, even if I am "sinful from the time my mother conceived me" and "sinful at birth," according to the words of the psalmist (Ps. 51:5), I am in no way guilty of the sins of my ancestors. Paul writes that before their birth, the children of Isaac and Rebekah had not yet "done anything good or bad" (Rom. 9:11). Certainly, they carried in themselves, by heredity, the consequences of Adam's sin, which would make them sinners inevitably, responsible for their own transgressions of the law of God, but they were not guilty, either by nature or by heredity. Thus it is for all who are "born of a woman, born under law" (Gal. 4:4), as was Jesus Himself.

On this point Ellen White writes, "It is inevitable that children should suffer from the consequences of parental wrongdoing, *but they are not punished for the parents' guilt*, except as they participate in their sins. It is usually the case, however, that children walk in the steps of their parents. By inheritance and example the sons become partakers of their father's sin. Wrong tendencies, perverted appetites, and debased morals, as well as physical disease and degeneracy, are transmitted as a legacy from father to son, to the third and fourth generation."¹⁰

What the posterity of Adam and Eve has inherited is the tendency to sin and the consequences of sin: death. By their transgression the venom of the serpent was injected into human nature like a deadly virus. But in Christ God has provided a saving vaccine.

“In the Likeness of Sinful Flesh”

In the light of what we have just said concerning the nature of sin, it should be understood that it was possible for Jesus to live without sin, free from all corruption, in thought and in deed, “in the likeness of sinful flesh.”

There has been much discussion on the meaning of the word “likeness” (*homoiomati*). Obviously, it emphasizes resemblance, similitude, identity, but not difference. In the three passages where the expression is used, it always indicates an identity of nature that has to do with the *resemblance* to the flesh (Rom. 8:3), with man (Phil. 2:7), or with temptation (Heb. 2:17). In order to be in a position to help “Abraham’s descendants . . . he had to be made like his brothers in every way” (Heb. 2:16, 17).

However, it is important to understand that Paul did not say that Christ “resembled” carnal man. Nor that His flesh “resembled” that of sinful man, defiled by a life of sin, and slave of evil propensities. The apostle limited the *resemblance* to the flesh in which dwelt “the law of sin,” and where “the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16, KJV) held sway.

According to James 1:15, lust is only the father of sin, and not sin itself, just as sin is the father of death, and not death itself. These lusts are temptations to which all human beings are subject, and that Jesus Himself had to confront, since He was “tempted in every way, just as we are” (Heb. 4:15). But, unlike all others, Christ never allowed His evil tendencies although hereditary and potentially sinful, to become sins. He always knew “enough to reject the wrong and choose the right” (Isa. 7:15), from the day of His birth until His death on the cross.

Ellen White and the supporters of traditional Christology distinguish between “hereditary tendencies,” and “cultivated tendencies to wrongdoing.”¹¹ Now, if Jesus inherited evil tendencies, He never

“cultivated” them. This is why she could write that Christ knew “by experience . . . the *strength* of our temptations,”¹² as well as “the *strength* of passion of humanity,”¹³ but without ever yielding to their powers of attraction.

The best explanation concerning the difference between *inherited* and *cultivated* tendencies is found in Ellen White’s letter to Baker. This explanation is all the more significant because this letter is the principal document on which the promoters of the new Christology rely to affirm that Christ took the sinless nature of Adam before the Fall. In truth, Ellen White *contrasts* the nature of Christ with the nature of Adam before the Fall.

“Do not set Him [Christ] before the people as a man with the *propensities of sin*. He is the second Adam. The first Adam was created a pure, sinless being, without a taint of sin upon him; he was in the image of God. He could fall, and he did fall through transgressing. Because of sin his posterity was born with *inherent propensities of disobedience*. But Jesus Christ was the only begotten Son of God. He took upon Himself human nature, and was tempted in all points as human nature. He could have sinned; He could have fallen, but not for one moment was there in Him an *evil propensity*.”¹⁴

By equating “inherent propensities of disobedience,” inherited by all of Adam’s posterity, with “evil propensity,” which Jesus did not have, the theologians of the new Christology, like those of the alternative Christology, have misinterpreted Ellen White’s letter to Baker, in contradiction to her own writings elsewhere.

“In treating upon the humanity of Christ,” she wrote to Baker, “you need to guard strenuously every assertion, lest your words be taken to mean more than they imply, and thus lose or dim the clear perceptions of His humanity as combined with divinity.”¹⁵ “I perceive,” she adds, “that there is a danger in approaching subjects which dwell on the humanity of the Son of the infinite God.”¹⁶

Hence these warnings: “Be careful, exceedingly careful as to how you dwell upon the human nature of Christ. Do not set Him before the people as a man with the propensities of sin.”¹⁷ “Never, in any way, leave the slightest impression upon human minds that a taint of, or inclination to, corruption rested upon Christ, or that He

in any way yielded to corruption. . . . Let every human being be warned from the ground of making Christ altogether human, such an one as ourselves; for it cannot be.”¹⁸

However, if Ellen White insists, on the one hand, on the perfect sinlessness of Christ, she also states that His sinless nature was acquired “under the most trying circumstances,”¹⁹ “that He might understand the force of all temptations wherewith man is beset.”²⁰ But “on not one occasion was there a response to his [Satan’s] manifold temptations. Not once did Christ step on Satan’s ground, to give him any advantage. Satan found nothing in Him to encourage his advances.” “‘It is written’ was His weapon of resistance, and it is the sword of the Spirit which every human being is to use.”²¹

Certainly, we shall never understand perfectly how Christ could be “tempted in all points like as we are, and yet be without sin.” Ellen White affirms, “The Incarnation of Christ has ever been, and will ever remain a mystery.”²² Paul even stated that “the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory” (1 Tim. 3:16).

Since the new Christology claims support from some Ellen White statements—particularly those in her letter to Baker—it is appropriate to show that this letter is in perfect agreement with the teaching of the early pioneers, and in harmony with the teaching of the apostles.

The Reasons for the Incarnation

Without doubt, the Incarnation of the Son of God will always hold a certain mystery to human understanding. However, the mystery concerns more the *how* of the Incarnation than the *why*. No Bible passage explains *how* “the Word became flesh,” or *how* the divine and human natures were combined in the person of Christ. On the other hand, Jesus and the apostles expressed themselves clearly about the *why* of His coming. That is to say, the solution to the problem of the Incarnation should first be sought in the light of what God has revealed.

Throughout the centuries theologians have gone astray in their

answers to the *why* of the Incarnation. Most frequently they have explained the sacrifice of Christ in relation to God rather than to man. The theories of penal substitution have made it seem that God needed Christ's suffering, or the blood of an innocent victim, to pardon sins. But God defines Himself as being, by nature, "the compassionate and gracious God, . . . forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin" (Ex. 34:6, 7).

Isaiah 53 shows to what extent human understanding of the gift of God can be erroneous: "yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted," whereas "he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities" (Isa. 53:4, 5). Obviously, Jesus did not offer Himself in sacrifice to appease the wrath of an offended God. God did not avenge Himself on Jesus to satisfy His justice. All the texts that explain the reason for Jesus' coming affirm, to the contrary, that God sent His only Son *for us*. God is always presented as the Initiator of the plan of salvation and Jesus as the Mediator between God and men. "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up *for [hyper] us all*" (Rom. 8:32). Jesus confirmed this through the symbols of the Lord's Supper: "This is my body given *for [hyper] you* . . . This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out *for [hyper] you*" (Luke 22:19, 20).

Paul did his best to help us understand the reasons for the coming of Christ. But we must agree with Peter that in his Epistles are "some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort" (2 Peter 3:16). Paul's Christology indeed constitutes one of the major difficulties. However, no passage is more revealing than the one in which he shows on one hand the wretched situation of man "sold unto sin" (Rom. 7:14-24, KJV); on the other, the reasons for which God sent "his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:2-4, KJV).

To the question that Paul asks himself: "Who will rescue me from this body of death?" he replies: "Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:24, 25). Then the apostle summarizes four specific reasons—to explain the *why* of God's saving action.

1. “*To be a sin offering*”

This reason is fundamental and justifies all others. For obviously, if there had been no sin in the beginning, the Incarnation of Christ would not have been necessary. But, because of sin, and because of His love for humanity, “God . . . gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). The entire Bible is God’s response to the problem of sin.

As soon as sin entered the world, as the result of Adam and Eve’s disobedience to the laws of the Creator, God revealed His plan for salvation. Before revealing to our first parents the consequences of sin, He promised them a Saviour born from the seed of the woman. While the serpent would bruise His heel, He vowed to crush its head (Gen. 3:15).

Thus, through the centuries, the promise of a Saviour has been renewed. Through the angel Gabriel God announced to Daniel the prophet that the Messiah would come at a specified time to accomplish His work of redemption: “to finish transgression, to put an end to *sin*, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness” (Dan. 9:24). Ultimately, when Jesus presented Himself to John the Baptist on the shores of the Jordan River, John proclaimed him as the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

The mission of Christ once accomplished, Paul explains in similar terms the reason why God sent “His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh”; namely, to condemn “sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3, KJV).

2. To Condemn “*sin in the flesh*”

Evidently this condemnation of sin was not made “vicariously” or on the basis of a simple legal transaction on God’s part. Because of sin it was necessary for the Word to become flesh (John 1:14), that Christ be “made like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:17, KJV), and that He be “tempted like as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15, KJV).

To condemn “sin in the flesh,” Paul specifies that it is “in the body of his flesh” (Col. 1:22) that Christ triumphed over sin, struggling against sin to the point of shedding blood (Heb. 12:4). Through “His flesh” Christ “opened a new and living way” (Heb. 10:20), which led to our reconciliation with God. Peter declared

that Christ “bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness” (1 Peter 2:24).

Moreover, to abolish death (2 Tim. 1:10), as well as all “the devil’s work” (1 John 3:8), Christ had to participate in the “flesh and blood” of man, “so that by His death He might *destroy* him who holds the power of death—that is the devil” (Heb. 2:14). That was prerequisite for Christ to become “a high priest . . . who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Heb. 7:26), and to be in a position to “deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Heb. 2:15, KJV). That is the third reason given by Paul to justify the Incarnation of Christ.

3. To Free Human Beings “*from the law of sin and death*”

Having condemned sin in the flesh, Christ could now act to deliver man from the bondage of sin. “Because he himself suffered when he was tempted [yet without sin], he is able to help those who are being tempted” (Heb. 2:18; 4:15). To free man from sin constitutes, therefore, the primary objective of Christ’s Incarnation.

To help us understand, the sacred writers used the language of a society that practiced slavery, and where it was necessary to pay a *ransom* to *free* a slave. Jesus Himself made use of these words to illustrate the reason for His mission. “Everyone who sins,” He said, “is a slave to sin.” But He adds for the benefit of His public: “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:34, 36). For “the Son of Man came . . . to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45; Matt. 20:28).

Paul, likewise, uses these expressions. He writes to the Galatians: “But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law, to *redeem* [literally: “to buy up”] those under law, that we might receive the full rights of sons” (Gal. 4:4, 5). In his letter to Timothy, he reminds that Jesus Christ “gave himself as a *ransom* for all men” (1 Tim. 2:6). Then in Titus he writes that Jesus “gave himself for us to redeem [literally: “to set free”] us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:14). In short, Jesus not

only appeared to *take away* our sins (1 John 3:5), but also to *free* us from them (Rev. 1:5; 1 John 1:7-9).

4. “*That the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us*”

This is the ultimate objective for which God sent His Son “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” The conjunction “in order that” (*ina*), which introduces this last statement of Paul, marks the purpose of the action of Christ on our behalf. Note that it is not justification (*dikaiosisune*) which is dealt with here but rather the righteous (*dikaionoma*) requirements of the law.

In our situation as human beings, prisoners of the law of sin, we are incapable of obeying the commandments of God. Even when we desire to, we lack the power. Furthermore, by itself the law is powerless to free us from the power of sin. “If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” (Gal. 2:21). However, that does not mean that the law is abolished and that we no longer need observe it. On the contrary, Paul affirms that “keeping God’s commands is what counts” (1 Cor. 7:19). Jesus was sent to enable us to live according to the will of God, expressed in His law, for which He has given us the example.

By His participation in the blood and flesh of humanity, and by reason of His victory over “sin in the flesh,” Jesus became for us a vital principle, an empowerment for transformation, able to empower every sinner to “the obedience that comes from faith” (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). For if, through human solidarity, “just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners,” Paul gives us the assurance also that “through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous” (Rom. 5:19).

In harmony with the promised new covenant, of which Christ is the Mediator, the law is no longer simply written on tables of stone. “After that time, says the Lord, I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds” (Heb. 10:16). In this way the righteousness of the law can be accomplished in us, so that thereafter we should no longer walk after the flesh, but after the Spirit, following Christ’s example.

Victory Through “the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus”

In the same passage of the Epistle to the Romans Paul does not merely explain the *why* of Christ’s mission. He also shows us the secret of His victory over sin, and *how* the impossible can become possible for those who are in Christ. Twice the apostle makes reference to the Spirit: first, to say that in Christ was “the Spirit of life”; then, to show *how*, through the Spirit of Christ, we are enabled to “walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6).

1. Christ, “justified in the Spirit”

One of the essential revelations of Christology resides in the fact that Christ Himself, during His manifestation in the flesh, had to be “justified in the Spirit” (2 Tim. 3:16). By reason of His victory over sin and death, Jesus “through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God” (Rom. 1:4). Although Jesus “was made of the seed of David according to the flesh” (Rom. 1:3, KJV), Matthew specifies that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (Matt. 1:18, 20). According to the psalmist, He was placed under the care of God from His birth (Ps. 22:10).

Then, at His baptism, Jesus “saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him” (Matt. 3:16). The Spirit also led him into the desert, “to be tempted by the devil” (Matt. 4:1). Because God gave Jesus “the Spirit without limit” (John 3:34), Paul wrote that “in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form” (Col. 2:9). In all actuality, “God was in Christ reconciling the world unto them” (2 Cor. 5:19, KJV).

The whole life of Jesus in this world, like all His work in behalf of man’s salvation, carries the stamp of “the Spirit of life” that was in Him. “Anointed . . . with the Holy Spirit and power . . . , he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him” (Acts 10:38). Without the Spirit, Jesus would never have been able to achieve the works He accomplished. “The Son can do nothing by himself” (John 5:19, 30). Moreover, without the Spirit of God, He would not have been able to vanquish the power of sin in His own flesh. But by the Spirit He sanctified Himself (John 17:19), in order to become “such a high

priest . . . who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens" (Heb. 7:26).

To help us understand how God wants us to benefit from Christ's victory, Paul applies the typology of the two Adams. He presents Jesus as the new Adam, destined to replace Adam the transgressor. Whereas, "the first man Adam became a living being; the last Adam [Christ], a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45); in other words, a spirit that creates life. Hence, according to the principle of human solidarity, by the disobedience of the first Adam "sin entered the world . . . , and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men" (Rom. 5:12). But by His obedience the Second Adam brought "life for all men" (Rom. 5:18). "And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man," the apostle concludes, "so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven" (1 Cor. 15:49). There is one condition, however: the Spirit of life which was in Christ must likewise dwell in us. For "if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Rom. 8:9).

2. Transformed by "*the Spirit of Christ*"

The same Spirit that allowed Jesus to win the victory over sin should likewise act in us with power to make of us children of God. Jesus was the first to explain this to Nicodemus: "No one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. . . . You must be born again." Like the action of the wind, "so it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:5-8).

Jesus spoke to His disciples of "the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive." But John explains: "Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified" (John 7:39). That is why, after having announced His departure, Jesus reassured His disciples: "But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment" (John 16:7, 8). Even more, "when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13).

Immediately after His resurrection Jesus renewed the promise:

“In a few days, you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 1:5). Then He repeated: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). What Jesus had promised to the twelve, and fulfilled at Pentecost, He likewise promised to all who respond to the pleading of the Spirit. For “all authority in heaven and on earth” has been given to Him (Matt. 28:18). Christ is working to draw all human beings to Himself (John 12:32), both to make the truth clear to them and to enable them to live by the Spirit, as He Himself did.

Since Pentecost God bestows His Spirit on whoever asks Him for it (Luke 11:13). And for those who receive it, the Spirit dwells in them, and Christ through His Spirit. Just as Jesus conquered “sin in the flesh” by the Spirit, He likewise enables His children to conquer by the power of the Spirit. Indeed, 2 Peter 1:4 states that they “may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

By His ministry Jesus has therefore opened the way for the Spirit, and given birth to a new generation of human beings regenerated by the Spirit. And to all who are born of the Spirit, God gives not only the power “to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions” but also “to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:12, 13).

Ellen White summarized perfectly what Adventists believe regarding the role of the Spirit in the life of the believer. “It is the Spirit that makes effectual what has been wrought out by the world’s Redeemer. It is by the Spirit that the heart is made pure. Through the Spirit the believer becomes a partaker of the divine nature. Christ has given His Spirit as a divine power to overcome all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to evil, and to impress His own character upon His church.”²³ “Christ died on Calvary that man might have the power to overcome his natural tendencies to sin.”²⁴

The life of professing Christians is therefore not limited to the forgiveness of sins, or that of “an easy religion that requires no striving, no self-denial, no divorce from the follies of the world.”²⁵ On

the contrary, the Spirit of life that is in Christ has actually freed the Christian from the slavery of sin so that he can live victoriously after the example of the Saviour. "The life that Christ lived in this world, men and women can live through His power and under His instruction. In their conflict with Satan they may have all the help that He had. They may be more than conquerors through Him who loved them and gave Himself for them."²⁶

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter we will quote one last passage taken from an Ellen White manuscript on the subject of the humiliation of Christ. In it Ellen White explains Christ's human nature in a way that could not be clearer.

First she recalls the fundamental data of biblical Christology: "He [Christ] had not taken on Him even the nature of the angels, but humanity, perfectly identical with our own nature, except without the taint of sin."

Then, recognizing the difficulties of some in understanding a truth totally opposed to the creeds of the mainline churches, Ellen White continues: "But here we must not become in our ideas common and earthly, and in our perverted ideas we must not think that the liability of Christ to yield to Satan's temptations degraded His humanity and He possessed the same sinful, corrupt propensities as man.

"The divine nature, combined with the human, made Him capable of yielding to Satan's temptations. The test to Christ was far greater than that of Adam and Eve, for Christ took our nature, fallen but not corrupted, and would not be corrupted unless He received the words of Satan in the place of the words of God. To suppose He was not capable of yielding to temptation places Him where He cannot be a perfect example for man."²⁷

The passage that follows clearly shows that if Jesus had lived a sinless life in a human nature different from ours and if He had not been "made like his brothers in every way" (Heb. 2:17), He would not be "able to help those who are being tempted" (Heb. 2:18). This is the same truth John outlines in the prologue of his Gospel, and that is at the heart of biblical Christology: "The Word"—

which “was with God in the beginning”—“became flesh and made his dwelling among us,” “full of grace and truth. . . . From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.” “To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God” (John 1:2, 14, 16, 12).

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⁵———, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 177.

⁶———, *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 95.

⁷———, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 71.

⁸———, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 155.

⁹———, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 49.

¹⁰———, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890), p. 306. (Italics supplied.)

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¹⁸*Ibid.*

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹*Ibid.*

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²³E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 671.

²⁴———, *Review and Herald*, Feb. 2, 1992.

²⁵———, *The Great Controversy*, p. 472.

²⁶———, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 22.

²⁷Ellen G. White manuscript 111, 1890. Extract from Journal 14, pp. 272-285.

EPILOGUE

This is not the first time the Adventist Church has had to confront a serious theological problem. None of the doctrines of the church have ever been adopted without earnest, careful study, and sometimes after long periods of discussion, research, and prayer. By comparing their divergent convictions, the pioneers were able to discard erroneous theological concepts at times inherited from various Christian tradition and to set forth clearly the biblical truths as revealed by the Scriptures.

To accomplish this task, the principle applied was consistent with that practiced by the Reformers: *sola scriptura*. “The Bible, and the Bible alone, is to be our creed. . . . Man is fallible, but God’s word is infallible. . . . Let us lift up the banner on which is inscribed, The Bible our rule of faith and discipline.”¹ This was the foundation upon which the fundamental beliefs of the Adventist Church were established—none other.

When the problem of justification by faith was discussed at Minneapolis in 1888, Ellen White thought it necessary to remind the delegates of the only valid method to resolve a doctrinal problem. “Let us take our Bibles, and with humble prayer and a teachable spirit, come to the great Teacher of the world. . . . We must search the Scriptures for evidences of truth. . . . All who reverence the Word of God *just as it reads*, all who do His will to the best of their ability, will know of the doctrine, whether it be of God. . . . Any other way is not God’s way, and will create confusion.”²

Because the church has not always held strictly to this method in its search for truth, it suffers today from a regrettable state of confusion in regard to Christology. The inevitable result is that the same confusion now appears in relation to the doctrine of justification by faith.³ It is high time to recognize the seriousness of the situation and to consider a special forum for the express purpose of profound research into the various theological and historical aspects of Christology.

This study was not undertaken to escalate a controversy that unfortunately has already taken its toll. Our purpose is simply to make known the unanimous teaching of the church pioneers from its very beginning to the 1950s, as well as the various interpretations offered by authors of recent decades. Objectivity in this issue requires an understanding of all the related history. The advice of Ellen White—whose writings are themselves at the heart of the controversy—should be carefully followed if we expect to ever reach unity: “Let all prove their positions from the Scriptures and substantiate every point they claim as truth from the revealed Word of God.”⁴

Since I penned this history of Adventist Christology—intentionally limited to the first 150 years of the church (1844-1994)—several works have been published to help resolve the controversy dividing us.⁵ Each of these books makes a significant contribution to the discussion, but because of their opposing viewpoints, they also maintain the confusion.

It is important to remember Kenneth Wood’s statement: “Before the church can proclaim with power God’s last warning message to the world, it must be united on the truth about Christ’s human nature.”⁶ It can never be repeated enough: “The humanity of the Son of God is everything to us. It is the golden chain that binds our souls to Christ, and through Christ to God. This is to be our study.”⁷

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⁵ A. Leroy Moore, *Adventism in Conflict: Resolving the Issues That Divide Us* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1995), see especially pp. 145-157; Woodrow W. Whidden II, *Ellen White on Salvation: A Chronological Study* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1995), see especially pp. 57-65; Jack Sequeira, *Saviour of the World: The Humanity of Christ in the Light of the Everlasting Gospel* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1996); Woodrow W. Whidden II, *Ellen White on the Humanity of Christ* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1997).

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